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HUMOUR AND LAUGHTER IN THE WORKPLACE: A DISCURSIVE ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

Guy Huber

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Abstract

My study explores relationships between humour and dominant discourses, viewing humour as a key sensemaking device, by which organizational members seek to shape understandings and comprehend themselves and others. I examine how discourses are interpreted, maintained and modified through language, paying particular attention to relations of power. Humour and laughter contribute to the reproduction and transformation of discourses, acting as a resource that members draw on to construct and shape meanings and understandings. My thesis seeks to reposition humour away from the periphery of critical management studies and to construct it more centrally, by examining the interplay between humour, dominant discourses and identity construction. Power is exercised in humour through the subtlety of ironic eye contact, through an amusing anecdote, through the mutuality of an "inside" joke, through shared perspectives and through the associative force of shared laughter, a polyphonic form of agreement and an acknowledgement that others relate in-the-moment. Humour provides interpretations that enable dialogue and open up space for new meanings; a contact point that allows individuals to fashion identities in concert with others from wide ranging sources of influence and inspiration. My research epistemology recognises the interaction and exchange of perspectives from which organizational members subjectively constitute the discourses available to them and explores how dominant discourses are supported and modified through humour. I chose a qualitative methodological approach that focuses on the importance of language in shaping local realities. This required a hermeneutic approach to gathering materials; including participant observation and semi-structured interviews to facilitate interpretations based on the interaction and integration of theory and empirical data. My ethnographic account is based on an in-depth case study of the Park Slope Food Cooperative in Brooklyn New York. I have provided a reflexive account that highlights my own involvement and added vignettes that are intended to enrich my findings and further demonstrate my authorial positions and outlooks. I conclude by applying four different epistemologies to the same setting, demonstrating that my interpretations were fostered through an interrelated set of theoretical perspectives. This thesis provides a rich source of material to further our understanding of the ways in which relations of power are established and maintained within organizations. Humour both emphasises and disturbs relations of power and warrants consideration in any discussion of dominant discourses, mutual action and identity formation within organizations.

1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the key tenets of my thesis, situating my research with regard to the literatures on relations of power (Knights and Willmott, 1989; Fairclough, 1995; Fournier, 1999) and identity construction (Starkey and McKinlay, 1998; Albert, Ashforth and Dutton, 2000; Alvesson and Willmot, 2004). After reading the literature exploring humour in the workplace, I was introduced to materials examining relations of power and became interested in dialogues on structure and agency. I was drawn to a statement by Van Maanen (1979: 541), in which he expressed the opinion that when concepts appear to operate paradoxically, it is then that the researcher has discovered something novel. I reflected on this for some time and came to realise that the incongruity embedded within humour frames the contrary nature of everyday lives (Billig, 2005) and provides an original perspective for examining the complex interrelation between the individual and the social. On returning to the literature on humour in organizations (Collinson, 1994; Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Holmes, 2000; Collinson, 2002; Terrion and Ashforth, 2002; Westwood, 2004), I found that I saw humour from a different perspective. Much of the literature discussed the functionality of humour and de-emphasised how humour and laughter are used to create and maintain meaning through the mobilisation of dominant discourses. I then read the main theories on humour in order to find material for my perspectives and found that Hobbes (1651a), Freud (1905) and Bergson (1911) provided support for my ideas and that their arguments had not been fully utilised by previous literature examining workplace humour.

1.2 Statement of Intent

My thesis aims to make a contribution to the critical management literatures on humour in organizations (Collinson, 1994; Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Holmes and Marra, 2002) by providing a novel theoretical analysis (Phillips and Pugh, 1994: 62) that emphasises the "power in" humour (Deetz, 1992). Rather than seeking to examine the function of humour, this study explores the importance of language in shaping meanings, understandings and identities, viewing dominant discourses as *"domains of objects and rituals of truth"* that form relations of power/knowledge that are embedded in conversations, texts and feelings (Foucault 1991: 194). These relations of power are mediums of social control within organizations and primary in the construction of organizational meanings and interpretations, actively influencing the range of attitudes and behaviours that members call on to enact identities

(Fairclough, 1989: 3). However, these dominant discourses are constituted in conversations and social interactions, shaped by all forms of communication, including humour and are caught up in language games that simultaneously provide structure and opportunities for agency.

Humour does not stand outside of dominant discourses, so that agency is situational and a reflection of power/knowledge relationships that *"invoke a context for meaning making"* (Tsoukas and Hatch, 2001: 998). However, discourses *"are constituted by multiple, changing, occasionally consonant, sometimes overlapping, but often competing narratives"* (Brown, Humphreys and Gurney, 2005: 314) and the *"the dynamics of humour are situated within, as well as reacting against these complex relations"* (Billig, 2005: 180). This study suggests that humour is enacted through relations of power, but also provides a degree of influence, shaping how discourses are understood and mobilised, often occupying the interstitial spaces at the intersection of dominant discourses (Gabriel, 2000) and is "*a universal human activity that invites us to become philosophical spectators on our lives…. humour changes the situation in which we find ourselves"* (Critchley, 2007: 28).

My thesis seeks to reposition humour away from the periphery of critical management studies and construct *"this radical contingency of everyday life"* (Mumby, 2009: 336) as fundamental to organizational discourse. Power can be exercised in humour through the subtlety of ironic eye contact, through an amusing anecdote, through the inherent mutuality of an "inside" joke, through shared feelings (Foucault, 1977: 27) and through the associative force of shared laughter, a polyphonic form of agreement and an acknowledgement that others relate in the moment (Hobbes, 1651a; Holmes, 2006: 27). Humour is fundamental to how members construct and negotiate shared identities from the discourses available to them (Sluss and Ashforth, 2007), providing a contact point and sense of connection that allows individuals to fashion identities from wide ranging *"sources of influence and inspiration"* (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002: 622). The incongruities and juxtapositions that give humour its voice, provide agency in the construction of identities, allowing members to reflexively foster outlooks that become fundamental to how they interpret discourses (Dahler-Larsen, 1997) and construe others within their social domains (Albert *et al*., 2000).

By constructing "the organization" as a site of power (Mumby, 1987; Fairclough, 1995; Clegg *et al*. 2006), my intention is to provide a rich account of the importance of humour in shaping dominant discourses. Humour is a mode of language that contributes to the reproduction and transformation of discourses (Clegg *et al.*, 2006), acting as a resource that members draw on to influence others. Humour provides valuable insight into how *"organizational members*

construct meanings, both collective and individual, out of communication processes that are inherently ambiguous and open to multiple interpretations" (Mumby, 2001: 595). Humour is often spontaneous, emergent and readily expressed (Roberts and Johnson, 1957), making dominant discourses *"both more clear and less taken for granted"* (Rhodes, 2001: 381). The paradoxes and incongruences embedded within humour require a complex understanding of the interrelations between the individual and the social, taking account that *"under the moral smokescreen supplied by humour, people can express deeper feelings and views. Even more, they can express the ambiguity that they feel"* (Gabriel, Fineman and Sims, 2000: 194). Humour provides alternative frames of reference for those *"open to playing with…. reality in a variety of ways"* (Rhodes, 2001: 377) and is an important medium for interpreting discourses (Mulkay, 1988) through *"the juxtaposing of order and disorder, frames of past learning and cues for present action"* (Colville, Hennestad and Thoner, 2013: 1).

My in-depth case study explores how humour and laughter sustain and transform dominant discourses at the Park Slope Food Coop (referred to as simply the Coop from now on) in Brooklyn, New York (Appendices 11.2). I undertook an ethnography of humour and laughter that sought to understand how organizational participants used humour to interact with one another while in the workplace and also asked participants to comment reflexively on their use of humour at the Coop. Members constructed humour as a way to connect, identify and relate to other organizational insiders, so that humour and laughter became influential relational constructs in organizational life (Dixon, 2011: 284). This was evident in informant talk about forming social relations through humour, with many speaking about being *"motivated to identify with others as a means of attaining a human connection"* (Sluss and Ashforth, 2007: 15). Humour often constituted this desire (Dixon, 2011) and provided a point of contact between individuals and relations of power that did not "*forbid or negate, but rather [produced] identities, knowledge, and the possibilities for behaviour"* (Mumby, 2001: 607).

1.3 Overview of Methodology

My thesis explores the importance of language in shaping organizational realities (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1998; Alvesson and Karreman, 2000; Gubrium and Holstein, 2003; Suddaby, 2006) and examines the *"power in rather than the power of language"* (Deetz, 1992: 77). It was important to use a methodology that was sensitive to this focus and had practical utility (Silverman, 2000: 12). This is reflected in my ontological position, which views context and behaviour as interdependent (Cassell and Symon, 1994: 6) and seeks to understand *"how people make meaning, define, and develop lines of action within their situations"* (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson, 2008: 424). My research focus was *"characterized by taking human interpretation as a starting point for any analysis, with a concern for how [members] socially constructed reality"* (Cassell, Bishop, Symon, Johnson and Buehring, 2009: 516). My research epistemology recognises the interaction and exchange of perspectives, from which organizational members subjectively constitute the discourses available to them and seeks to reveal how discursive relations of knowledge/power are supported and modified by humour. My interpretive study follows in the traditions of contemporary management ethnography (Watson, 1994; Boje, 1995; Fournier, 1999; Casey, 1999; Brown and Humphreys, 2006), focusing on the socially constructed nature of relations of power to provide an analysis that highlights the interaction of humour and power in shaping understandings and meanings. This required an interpretive and discursive approach to gathering materials, including participant observation and semi-structured interviews to facilitate theoretical interpretations that were based on the interaction and integration of theory and empirical data (Brown 1998: 39). My literature review was used to uncover the ways in which members came to comprehend humour and laughter. I looked for examples of humour that supported particular ways of talking and examined how such humour was constructed through every-day interactions (Goffman, 1959).

1.4 Reflexivity

While my literature review provided *"direction in developing relevant categories and properties and in choosing possible modes of integration"* (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 79), I was careful to ensure that I kept an open mind, so that my theories only directed the study and did not dictate the observation and analysis. This recognises that it is important to ensure theories fit the data, providing a robust and simple explanation for the concepts and that re-interpretations and new perspectives are a function of self-learning (Rynes, McNatt, and Bretz, 1999). This thesis was a reflexive experience and in carrying out my interviews and analysis I have come to glean insights into my own character, identity and development as an academic. To highlight my own involvement and subjective positions, I have added vignettes or *"personalised accounts of fleeting moments of fieldwork case in dramatic form"* (Van Maanen, 1988: 136) that are intended to enrich my findings and represent my authorial positions and outlooks (Humphreys, 2004: 840). My insights were shaped by my engagement with the literature examining the "power in" discourse (Deetz, 1992), so that I came to understand humour as a key sensemaking device, through which members sought to comprehend others and shape understandings.

1.5 Structure of Thesis

My thesis consists of ten chapters: Introduction (1.0); Literature Review (2.0); Methodology (3.0); An Introduction to the Organization (4.0); Organizational Discourses and Humour (5.0); The Power in Humour and Laughter (6.0); Humour and Identity (7.0); Discussion (8.0); A Reflexive Account of my Ethnography (9.0) and Conclusion (10.0). In order to assist the reader, I have included a glossary of terms and abbreviations used at the Coop (Appendices 11.1). This brief introduction is followed by Chapter 2, which reviews the literature that shaped my thesis and provided a theoretical underpinning for subsequent chapters. The review begins with a detailed introduction (2.1) to the literature on humour and laughter; agency and structure; power and identity, constructing humour as a sensemaking device through which people comprehend themselves and others, fashioned by and influencing dominant organizational discourses. I then provide etymologies (2.2), focusing on key properties within humour and laughter. These aspects of humour are followed by a section (2.3) addressing key discourses on humour and laughter. The section discusses humour theories that concentrate on the social aspects of humour and is followed by a section examining the ways in which laughter acts to discipline situations, meanings and understandings (2.4). The next three sections examine humour and the social construction of emotion (2.5); the ways in which humour disciplines meanings and relationships (2.6) and the ways in which humour constitutes the

interplay of discourses (2.7).

This is followed by a detailed discussion surrounding my theoretical perspectives on humour. I begin by focusing on dualities embedded within humour, recognising that agency and structure are caught in a mutual embrace. Humour often reflects this relationship and can come to constitute autonomy, compliance, conformity or ambivalence. Section (2.8.2) discusses identity construction and positions humour as resource that individuals draw on to fashion identities from wide ranging and dynamic sources of inspiration. Section (2.8.3) discusses how dominant discourses discipline meaning, so that individuals often enact out power imbalances, mobilising humour that strengthens dominant discourses and privileges certain meanings. Section (2.8.4) discusses how humour is contextual and often allows situational meanings to become legitimate, reinterpreting discourse and opening up space for new concepts and perspectives. These discussions provide structure to my ethnography and make up the research questions, outlined in the introduction to my methodology chapter (3.1). I then outline my ontological and epistemological positions in the sections that follow. Sections 3.2 to 3.4 explore my interpretive approach to gathering and analysing data. I focus on how members of the organization subjectively constituted discourses available to them, viewing humour as a medium of social control and power (Fairclough, 1989: 3). I then detail my methodological approach (3.5) and provide discussions on ethnography (3.6), participant observation (3.7), reflexivity (3.8) and textuality (3.9). These sections build on each other to establish how my methodology provides a consistent and rigorous set of principles through which to examine research materials (3.10). I briefly discuss ethical considerations (3.11), before outlining how I collected, collated and analysed my data (3.12).

In Chapter 4, I present the case study organization, providing details of the Food Cooperative Association in the United States (4.2) and situate my depiction of the Coop (4.3) within an historical account of the food cooperative movement (4.4). I then situate the organization's associative community within dominant discourses that have contributed to a robust organizational identity (4.5) and discuss the member community and the dominant discourses that constitute cooperation (4.6). The Coop was founded on an egalitarian ethos and I examine the influence that this exerts on the membership (4.7), many of whom volunteer their labour (4.8). I then discuss the full-time staff who steward the organization (4.9). This section is followed by substantive findings chapters. The first chapter (5.0) examines the dominant discourses that constituted humour, presenting ethnographic materials that reveal how these discourse were mobilised, interpreted, fostered and shaped through humour and laughter. This provides a platform for the final two chapters, which examine the power in humour and laughter (6.0) and the influence of humour on identity construction at the Coop (7.0). These

chapters build an interrelated set of interpretations to provide a cumulative body of knowledge (Silverman, 1997: 1).

In Chapter 8, I consider my research findings through four interconnected readings that reflect my internal compass, formed through the absorption of my theoretical positions on humour (2.8) and reflecting my constant awareness of the need for reflexivity. The first reading (8.2) reflects my own involvement in this enquiry and draws on a central vignette to discuss the ways in which I influenced others and shaded research materials. The remaining three readings visit this same vignette, to demonstrate how different lenses can be applied to the same setting, altering the "angle of view on reality" (Escarpit, 1969). Reading (8.3) examines identity construction and uses Goffman's (1959) essay on the presentation of the self as a framework to comprehend the ways in which participants constructed humour to connect and bond with others. Reading (8.4) examines the "power in" humour from a Foucauldian perspective, constructing humour as a claim on meaning (Clegg, 1989), influenced and maintained through relations of power. The reading draws on research findings to discuss the various ways that humour disciplined meanings and perspectives at the Coop. The final reading (8.5) focuses on the ways members shaped the organization through humour. I apply a structural lens that recognises the instability of dominant discourses and organizational texts, drawing on my findings to discuss the ways dominant discourses were fostered, interpreted and shaped by members who embraced a desire to think as individuals (Giddens, 1984). In Chapter 9, I provide my own story, charting my journey within the Coop and continue the theme of reflexivity, relating my role as member and researcher, locating myself within my study and reflecting on my inclinations, mistakes and processes of discovery. In my Conclusion (10.0), I draw together these four readings to provide one final reading of my research findings. I then outline my contributions to the literature examining relations of power, identity construction and humour in organizations, before discussing the limitations of my thesis and areas for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

My study explores the relationships between humour and discourse, examining the interplay between humour and relations of power. The focus is on the ways that organizational members express viewpoints and shape meanings informally. Humour and laughter represent constructive and flexible ways in which language is used to constrain and construct meaning and this is central to my study (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). My literature review details my engagement with literature on humour in organizations and focuses on the tensions that exist between agency and structure. Humour and laughter are key phenomena through which we can understand discursive practices within organisations. People *"forge their lives in the midst of ambivalences and contradictions, using the idioms at their disposal"* (Kondo, 1990: 302) and humour is exercised in ways that provide valuable insights into how discourses and language are used reflexively in organisations to shape realities. Rather than simply reflecting outlooks, humour and laughter are integral to how people interpret the social spaces that are constituted by discourse and have a powerful effect on the social, demonstrating how language is mobilised to strengthen dominant discourses and to resist the full internalization of authoritative discursive texts.

This is an original conceptualization of the literature that does not privilege positive or negative perceptions of humour in organizations, but instead looks to interpret the power in, rather than the power of humour and laughter in the workplace (Deetz, 1992). Where this study departs from much of the previous literature examining humour in the workplace is the emphasis on the subtle meanings and understandings that are often voiced, revealed or indicated through humour. Much of the literature examining humour in the workplace focuses on how humour can be used as a management resource (Deal and Kennedy, 1982; Duncan, 1982; Decker, 1987; Consalvo, 1989; Morreall, 1991; Barsoux, 1993; Francis, 1994; Noon and Blyton, 1997; Avolio, Howell and Sosik, 1999; Janes and Olsen, 2000) or to question management's motives (Kunda, 1992; Collinson, 1994; Edwards, Collinson and Rocca, 1995; Rodrigues and Collinson, 1995; Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999; Collinson, 2002; Fleming and Spicer, 2003). This conceptualisation of humour discusses the degree of humour's functionality and de-emphasises how humour and laughter are used to create and maintain meaning through the mobilisation of discourses.

My discussion centres on the tensions that exist between structure and agency. These relations are reflected in the ambiguity and paradox of humour, *"an expression of our social selves and of the way we try to influence other people"* (Fineman and Gabriel, 1996: 23). In today's workplaces many forms of humour have become socially acceptable and this signals the mobilisation and reproduction of dominant discourses (Clegg, 1989) that de-emphasise how humour and laughter *"answer to certain requirements of life in common [and have] social signification"* (Bergson, 1911: 13 emphasis added). People assert themselves through humour and laughter and in so doing privilege certain discourses, disciplining meaning and making some outlooks appear more reasonable than others (Mitchell, Rediker and Beach, 1986). Rather than simply representing overt resistance or dominance, humour makes agency and discipline possible because our laughter invariably represents the discourses that are understood to author reality (Clegg, Courpasson and Phillips, 2006: 131).

I discuss the importance of relations of power and the political practices that render power effective (Knights and Willmott, 1989). I view organizational members as largely constructed by the discourses that are available to them, recognising the ability of those who govern to privilege particular forms of language use (Foucault, 1973). Humour and laughter help legitimize organizational discourses and can be viewed as a form of social discipline (Fairclough, 1992: 211). When an individual jokes that someone is acting outside of widely held norms or beliefs, they are displaying their sense of social structure and demonstrating how individual accounts are embedded in forms of social organisation, a hidden hand that constrains and informs human action (Durkheim, 1951). Humour and laughter discipline self-conduct (Foucault, 1977) by helping to determine perspectives, communication and understandings (Martin, 2007: 113), so that *"discipline is not an expression of power, but constitutive of it, and resides in every perception, every judgement, every act"* (Thornborrow and Brown, 2009: 358). People are attentive to the laughter of others and this guides behaviour, so that we often conform to commonly held meanings and views.

Organizations are socially constructed by creative agents that forge relationships which shape values and understandings. Humour plays an important role in communication and interaction, affecting relationships and helping to define social context (Linstead, 1985; Collinson, 1988; Watson, 1994; Berger, 1997; Holmes and Marra, 2002; Billig, 2005). The focus is on how organisational discourse is interpreted, maintained and modified through language. Social rules are constantly in flux, negotiated dynamically through individual interaction (Silverman, 1970). Rather than simply challenging management control through forms of irony and satire (cf. Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999), humour often mobilises discourses that constitute alternative realities. This process is often not overt or rebellious, rather humour allows

organizational members to put their *"structurally formed capacities to work in creative or innovative ways"* (Sewell, 1992: 4). Subconscious processes are triggered when we laugh and joke and these influence people in ways that reshape perspectives in subtle ways that reinvent and disturb prescribed norms and identities, *"a dynamic, continually emerging set of struggles among people trying to identify themselves in relation to others"* (Eisenhart, 2001: 214). Humour demonstrates how *"agency entails an ability to coordinate one's actions with others and against others, to form collective projects, to persuade, to coerce, and to monitor the simultaneous effects of one's own and others' activities*" (Sewell, 1992: 21)[1].

1 *"….structures shape people's practices, but it is also people's practices that constitute (and reproduce) structures" (Sewell, 1992: 4).*

2.2 Etymologies

The Oxford English Dictionary defines humour as *"the quality of action or speech that causes amusement"*. Psychologically, humour involves four essential elements; social context, cognitive perceptual processes, emotional response and the vocal behavioural expression of laughter (Martin, 2007). Humour is a basic element of human interaction and *"wit, irony, understatement, banter and teasing... are an integral part of almost all English social interaction"* (Fox, 2004: 179). Humour consists of non-verbal and verbal communication and definitions of humour generally reflect this behaviour as positively linked to a state of mirth, causing positive cognitive and affective responses in others (Martineau, 1972)[2]. Chapman and Foot (1976: 1) argue that *"to possess a good sense of humour or at least to laugh freely and frequently at humorous and pleasurable events is regarded as thoroughly healthy and desirable by virtually all those who have concerned themselves with the subject of humour"*. However, this does not consider how relations of power help explain distinctive outlooks towards humour and that social, political and power processes help shape subjectivities and identities, moderating how humour is used and received. Humour is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon (Cooper, 2005) and cannot simply be defined as causing laughter or given a clean bill of health (Billig, 2005).

Wit in all its forms is understood to be a highly sophisticated cerebral process linked to intellect. For example, the adjective witty is defined as amusingly clever in perception and expression (Cambridge English Dictionary). Wit is understood to be a product of acuity, linguistic skill and human culture that is often used deliberately to cause amusement. A witty person has an aptitude for using words and ideas in a quick and inventive way to cause humour

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2 **Organizational Humour Definitions**

a. *"Amusing communications that produce positive emotions and cognitions in the individual" (Romero and Cruthirds, 2006: 59)*

b. *"Any event shared by an agent with another individual, that is intended to be amusing to the target and that the target perceives as an intentional act" (Cooper, 2005: 766-767)*

c. *"Any type of communication that intentionally creates incongruent meanings and thereby causes laughter" (Duncan and Fiesal, 1989:19)*

d. *"As intended by the speaker to be amusing and perceived to be amusing by at least some of the participants" (Holmes, 2000: 163)*

e. *"Amusing communications that produce positive emotions and cognitions in the individual, group or organization" (Romero and Pescosolido, 2008: 396)*

f. *Put down humour is defined as "an attempt to derive amusement at the expense of something or someone" (Terrion and Ashforth, 2002: 59)*

(Oxford English Dictionary), *"wit is a gift for dashing off comic scenes in a few strokes – dashing them off, however, so subtly, delicately and rapidly, that all is over as soon as we begin to notice them"* (Bergson, 1911: 99). Freud (1905) named this cognitive process "joke work" and includes concepts such as displacement, unification, condensation, plays on words, indirect representation and fantasy.

The term joke is used to describe funny statements, wisecracks, quips and witty remarks. A standard joke is often told in the form of a short formulaic story that contains a punch line intended to amuse. The word stems from the Latin word Jocus, meaning "jest" or "wordplay". The joke's narrative often indicates to the listener that the conversation has taken an informal direction (Raskin, 1985), allowing others to anticipate a punch line. Then comes the turn in language that jars the logic and thinking sideways (Attardo, 1994) stimulating amusement, mirth and laughter. A comedian is someone who leads their audience in one direction only to suddenly transport them somewhere else (Maier, 1932). In most social encounters and relationships, a comedian is bound to surface at some point (Fox, 2004) injecting a verbal flourish, constructed for mirth and amusement (Carr and Greeves, 2006). This may rely on an "in joke" that is shared exclusively by a small group or a "standing joke" where something (or someone) regularly causes amusement and jest.

The humourist is someone who uses verbal and nonverbal clues that allow the listener to separate jokes from non-playful discussions that are governed by a different set of rules (Wilson, 1979). Humorous exchanges are understood as play and therefore do not attract the same scrutiny as non-playful exchanges, allowing other emotions to be expressed in this "unreal space" (Raskin, 1985). This concept of a "playful framework" (Mulkay, 1988) is integral to my understanding of how forms of humour such as banter and teasing are often not understood as negative by observers or target. Banter is the good natured exchange of teasing remarks, sharp one-liners and witty retorts; a combination of friendliness and antagonism (Grugulis, 2002) that in most cases exists in the spirit of fun. Humour is context dependent, contingent on many factors and often follows an implicit set of rules (Weick, 1979) that indicate the conversation is intended to be funny, allowing people to joke at each other's expense, as long as they remain within certain boundaries.

A joking relationship is *"a relation between two persons in which one is by custom permitted and in some instances required, to tease or make fun of the other, who in turn is required to take no offence.... so long as it is kept within certain bounds defined by custom"* (Radcliffe-Brown, 1940: 195, 208–9). In order to determine whether something is said in jest, there are *"a wide range of contextual and linguistic clues that are relevant to identifying instances of*

humour, including the speaker's tone of voice and the audience's auditory and discoursal responses. Laughter, and..... facial expression, including smiles, are also very important clues" (Holmes and Marra, 2002: 1693). When a person signals their ability to take a joke, they are also demonstrating that they have a superior sense of humour to others, *"for laughing to ones self putteth all the rest to jealousie, and examination of themselves"* (Hobbes, 1651b: 103). In banter people often understand the laughter of others as being ironic, so that an insult is in fact a back handed compliment and "putdowns" often signal that the person is important enough to notice and is respected enough to withstand the insult (Terrion and Ashforth, 2002).

Humour is sometimes described in ways that hint at darker motives; it is *"scarcely a vice, and yet all the vices are drawn into its orbit"* (Bergson, 1911: 154). Laughter is often unkind and does not leave everyone feeling "warm and fluffy". Something Freud (1905) argued, when discussing the aggressive nature of many forms of wit. Humour is a *"paradoxical phenomenon"* (Linstead, 1985: 741) and is often more amusing when it establishes a darker element. Indeed, it is only rhetoric and trust that distinguishes teasing from ridicule, where the object is to deride. Irony, understatement, sarcasm and satire create language where interpretations are very rarely clear-cut, especially when delivered with a poker or straight face. It is this ambiguity that allows people to voice opinions without the fear of formal sanction, as meanings become fractured (Rodrigues and Collinson, 1995). Organizational members often use irony to preserve some sense of diversity and to promote alternate discourses, influencing others (Fleming and Sewell, 2002). The word irony stems from the Latin, ironia, meaning to stimulate ignorance. To say something ironically, is to say something in *"an exaggerated manner as to be clearly intended as a joke"* (Fox, 2004: 56). In some cases irony is employed to provide one meaning for a privileged audience and another meaning for those addressed. When irony is used in a restrained or subtle manner, it is referred to as understatement. While it may be amusing, understatement may only raise a smile, rather than fully fledged laughter and this allows individuals to exercise a degree of restraint over feelings and outlooks[3].

Humour can be especially detrimental to authoritative discourses, because it can damage their legitimacy. People often attempt to expose something as false or misleading by poking fun at it (Kane, Suls and Tedeschi, 1977). When laughing we are acknowledging the humourist and it is an important part of socialising, so that when the subject is work related we are often reinforcing beliefs and signalling more than just amusement, laughter often signals that we

3 *"A joke is anarchic, a little scrap of chaos from beyond the boundaries of the rational, a toe dipped in the shallow end of antisocial behaviour"* (Carr and Greeves, 2006: 8). This is particularly true when language is being used to express the opposite of what is said and sarcasm is often referred to as "the lowest form of wit".

agree with the comment(s). This helps to explain why humour and laughter are often bound up with issues of power and control, and in particular how they are often positioned as interfering with the rational goals and success of organizations (Fineman, 2000).

Laughter is the expression or appearance of merriment or amusement, where a person's mood can be described as positive and happy. It involves *"a movement (usually involuntary) of the muscles of the face, especially the lips, usually with a peculiar expression of the eyes, indicating merriment, satisfaction or derision and attended by an interrupted expulsion of air from the lungs"* (cf. Chapman and Foot, 1976: 3). We are all familiar with this peculiar contraction of facial muscles and baring of teeth, accompanied by a series of respiratory spasms that give way to a burst of vowel based notes (Holt, 2008), because *"laughter, like language, is often cited as one of the distinguishing features of human beings"* (Oxford Companion to Philosophy). It is an emotional response that in evolutionary terms pre-dates language and humour (Provine, 1993). Laughter is the *"natural and universal expression of joy"* (Darwin, 1896: 218), providing *"a temporary emigration from the reality of everyday life"* (Berger, 1997: 11). We laugh instinctively at funny stimuli, it is hard wired, *"a universal trait that is found in every society, culture and civilization"* (Ramachandran and Blakeslee, 1998: 192) and laughter pierces most conversations, so that *"there are in fact very few situations to which laughter is not appropriate.... we laugh at something because it is familiar and something else because it is unfamiliar.... at misfortune…. [and] because other people are laughing uncontrollably; but controlled or calculated laughter, on the other hand, can drive our own smiles underground for hours…. We laugh if and because we are supposed to laugh.... to fill up the blank in the conversation…. [due] to relief from physical danger... and so on"* (Potter, 1954 cf. Chapman and Foot, 1976: 3-4).

While laughter is natural, we sometimes question whether the laughter of others is genuine. In the workplace, those in authority are often privileged in asymmetrical power relationships, sometimes generating laughter for reasons other than mirth (cf. Cooper, 2005). Laughter is often rhetorical and used to mask true feelings, so that it *"does not possess a single rhetorical force even within the context of humour" (Billig, 2005: 194)*. Simply the tone and sound of laughter can communicate displeasure, amusement or sarcasm (Moerman, 1988) and the *"character of the laughter itself; its actual sound, cannot be considered in isolation from its occasion"* (De Sousa, 1987: 279). For example, laughter is often employed to save face in embarrassing situations (Du Pre, 1998) and people may laugh in order to relieve the tension of the situation (Goffman, 1967). People often describe embarrassing situations as funny (Miller and Tangney, 1994) and those looking on often underestimate and misinterpret the negative emotions being felt (Marcus and Miller, 1999) when an embarrassed individual

smiles and laughs in order to hide painful feelings and make light of the situation to appease those laughing (Keltner, 1995). Likewise, non-laughter is often rhetorical and can be mobilised to signal that a norm or value has been breached. Non-laughter disciplines understandings and can be especially effective when there are asymmetrical power differences between individuals that help establish feeling rules and relationships (Hochschild, 1983).

2.3 Theoretical Discourses on Humour

Modern perspectives on humour are dominated by cognitive psychology (Martin, 2007), privileging the intellectual properties, with only a passing nod to the qualities present in humour that provide individuals with resources to strengthen and weaken normative discourses. Incongruity theory explains the structure of humour and argues that for something to be perceived as amusing there must be a violation of expectancy that makes sense. For example, witty jokes contain a change in the anticipated meaning of particular elements. This leads to a sudden restructuring and reinterpretation of the whole. The suddenness and unexpectedness with which the restructuring occurs is the critical factor. Fry (1963: 153) suggests the satisfaction derived from humour is due to the unexpected resolution of these paradoxes:

> *"During the unfolding of humour, one is suddenly confronted by an explicit-implicit reversal when the punch line is delivered . . . but the reversal also has the unique effect of forcing upon the humour participants an internal redefining of reality".*

Laughter is understood as the expression of incongruity (Morreall, 1987) and this rhetoric helps mask how humour and laughter are mobilised to defend our sense of self and discipline others. Incongruity theories on humour have been reproduced and legitimised to create discursive relations of knowledge/power that render humour's social signification invisible (Foucault, 1988) and de-emphasize how humour often strengthens dominant discourses so that people share ways of understanding, disciplining themselves and others through the regulation of outlooks and behaviour. Humour affects emotions and understandings and is a regular feature of workplace interactions (Collinson, 1994), fluidly shaping meanings and impacting relationships.

Freud (1905, 1928) considers social and unconscious factors, arguing that there are two distinct types of wit. Innocent humour is simply designed to give pleasure and consists of witty plays on words for fun's sake. However, the vast majority of humour is much more contentious. Freud (1905) describes these jokes as "tendentious", as they contain a general truth and are aimed at someone or something. This is often not a conscious process, allowing the expression of perceptions, feelings and ideas, that arrive from the preconscious, emerging into the conscious mind often unexpected, but fully formed, *"opening sources of pleasure that have become inaccessible"* (Freud, 1905: 147).

The ambiguity in humour makes it retractable because people can always claim that they were not being serious and were only joking (Keltner, 1995) and the *"ability to deny any serious intentions, even to oneself, is part of what makes humour so effective in many types of social situations"* (Martin, 2007: 117). For example, humour and laughter are sometimes utilised to embarrass and can be an effective relational weapon and social leveller (Goffman, 1955). Codes of politeness enable people to interact without loss of face (Goffman, 1967) and help ensure that people behave considerately to other social actors (Brown and Levinson, 1987). However, humour can allow people to breach these social conventions (Holmes, 2000) and act without empathy for the feelings of others (Mulkay, 1988), so that a *"joke can be little more than an insult, but a socially sanctioned one, where the insulted are often expected to take no offence"* (Carr and Greeves, 2006: 8).

For Hobbes (1651b), people are inherently selfish and laughter stems from self-interest, which rather than goodness is at the centre of all social activity. The humourist is viewed as egocentric and competitive, habitually expressing selfish impulses. There is a basic need within people to feel superior to others and a wish to maximise pleasure and minimise pain. When people are drawn together in the workplace, they often employ humour that is based on narcissistic forms of self-esteem, founded on competition, exhibitionism and valued identities (Collinson, 2003; Gabriel, 2008). Dominant discourses can trigger more aggressive forms of humour, where people attempt to elevate themselves at the expense of others and power often has an individualizing effect that *"leads subjects to turn in on themselves and, in so doing... forget or displace the social aspects of their relations with others"* (Knights and McCabe, 2003: 1615).

While humour can be used to assert and reassert relational power through emotional manipulation (Sharkey, 1997) it can also be used to protect our sense of self. A sense of humour is a defence mechanism that allows individuals to guard against unpleasant emotions and maintain a more rational and realistic view of their situation (Freud, 1928). A sense of humour operates in the preconscious, reversing the emotional tone, allowing the ego to take pleasure from triumphing over the grim reality provided by the super ego:

> The ego *"refuses to be hurt by the arrows of reality or to be compelled to suffer. It insists it is impervious to wounds dealt by the outside world, in fact, these are merely occasions for affording it pleasure"* (Freud, 1928: 220).

The ego triumphs via the "pleasure principle", affording the individual guilt free and narcissistic pleasure that results in feelings of strength, individualism and altruism (Freud, 1928). The humourist gains high self-esteem because they do not narrow their social interest in order to feel superior to others. Their ego defence mechanism has a liberating element that allows the individual to remain in control and preserve feelings of autonomy and a strong sense of self, while maintaining positive social relationships that foster joy, esteem and closeness (Freud, 1928). Research indicates that people generally have positive outlooks towards those who demonstrate a sense of humour (Martin, 2007). This is because *"individuals who use humour to cope in ways that are sensitive to their own and other people's broader psychological needs are likely to experience enhanced feelings of self-esteem and emotional wellbeing and more satisfying relationships with others in the longer term"* (Martin, 2007: 306).

While humour can act as a defence mechanism to maintain some level of autonomy, it is also mobilised in order to discipline values that are reflected in dominant discourses. The laughter of others often signals that people share similar outlooks and are demonstrating conformity. Hobbes (1651b) views humour as a cognitive comparison with others that produces perceptions of superiority. People laugh in company to share feelings of superiority and avoid feeling inferior, motivated by a desire to achieve a positive self-image through winning acceptance and status in the eyes of others: *"Laughing at offence must be at absurdities and infirmities, abstracted from persons, and when all the company may laugh together"* (Hobbes, 1651b: 103). This recognises that people conform to social norms, forming associations with others in order to defend themselves from insecurity (Hobbes, 1651a); that one of the emotional threats that people face in the workplace is the "tendentious" humour of others (Collinson, 1988; 2002) and that dominant discourses provide triggers for forms of disciplinary humour that help maintain and strengthen relations of power (Giddens, 1976).

2.4 The Language of Laughter

Laughter is part of the ebb and flow of conversations. Provine (2000) found that in one-to-one conversations the person speaking laughed 46% more than the person listening and that 20% of remarks that preceded laughter could not be regarded as humorous. Vettin and Todt (2004) found that people laugh as often with strangers as with friends and underestimate how often they laugh in conversation, because they are not experiencing mirth every time they laugh. This is because we use laughter rhetorically in order to communicate a vast number of social messages. Jefferson (1985) found that laughter is often subtly placed within serious remarks for many reasons. Examples include: softening a directive or complaint (Holmes, 2000); smoothing over difficult conversations (Mulkay, 1988); conveying amusement rather than outrage (Billig, 2005); to reassure others that an action or comment should not be taken seriously and conveys a friendly message (Martin, 2007) and displaying control over problems and anxieties (Du Pre, 1998). Therefore, a laugh can be so much more than a laugh, *"in conversational terms, it is not even a laugh: it is a serious part of conversational language"* (Billig, 2005: 192).

Studies have confirmed that we are influenced to laugh by the mirth of others. The emotion of mirth is usually shared and the sound of laughter alone is enough to trigger laughter in others (Provine, 1992). We laugh and joke more often in the presence of others (Provine, 1992) and are more likely to find something funny when others are laughing (Martin, 2007). Social laughter bonds group emotion (Dunbar, 2004) and this transmutation of feeling promotes interaction and communicates *"a wide variety of signs, for the damping and surging of responses, and for the emergence of homeostatic-like controls"* (Goffman, 1961: 97). An air of consensus helps establish the parameters for humour and acts as a *"contact point where techniques of domination – or power – and techniques of the self interact, where technologies of domination of individuals over one another have recourse to processes by which the individual acts upon himself and conversely,... where techniques of the self are integrated into structures of coercion"* (Foucault, 1980, quoted in Burchell, 1993: 268).

The context of laughter is important in determining how language is being used. Laughter is understood as a coded social message that allows others to become complicit in its communication. We can only understand laughter through observing others. We are therefore likely to better understand culture and group dynamics by paying attention to what makes people laugh and *"in order to find a joke funny, the listener often has to share the same attitudes"* (De Sousa, 1987: 290). Laughter does not have to be cruel or calculated in order to discipline others. We may laugh at the transgressions of others, but we also simultaneously

disarm ourselves from finding serious fault (Bergson, 1911: 124). People are often unaware of the disciplinary nature of laughter and only perceive positive functions associated with the emotion of mirth. Our conscience is distracted by the playful id and our accounts are likely to be overly positive and innocent as a result (Freud, 1905). We often hide humour's true nature from ourselves, repressing our feelings in order to believe that we are laughing at something that is objectively funny (Berger, 1997). However, laughter allows people to free themselves from social empathy (Billig, 2005) and often has *"a secret or unconscious intent"* (Bergson, 1911: 123).

Laughter acts as a disciplinary mechanism in the regulation of self-conduct (Foucault, 1978). Even when spontaneous, laughter involves complicity with others, real or imaginary and *"appears to stand in need of an echo"* (Bergson, 1911: 11). Laughter is an act of language and is universally used as a mode of communication (De Sousa, 1987). It presupposes sociality, in that it requires a recipient or butt; someone to whom the laughter is liable (De Sousa, 1987: 281). When a person does not fit in with prevailing norms, they are likely to become a butt of humour:

> *"Laughter, then, does not belong to the province of aesthetics alone, since unconsciously.... it pursues a utilitarian aim of general improvement"* (Bergson, 1911: 23-24).

Laughter is used to communicate a wide range of social concepts, including feelings and etiquette to others and *"the rhetorical aspects of laughter are not merely social practices that have to be learnt; they are also part of the techniques of learning social practices and discouraging infractions"* (Billig, 2005: 199). Laughter is a social gesture that inspires others to restrain their behaviour and is a way for others to ensure someone is constantly aware of their social constraints. People are constantly on the alert for the social symbols presented in laughter (Bergson, 1911) and seek to adapt themselves to ensure that their behaviour and perspectives are flexible enough to fit in, creating a veneer of consensus (Goffman, 1959). Laughter has an aesthetic quality that is instrumental in governing the emotions of others and is corrective because people generally do not enjoy being laughed at (Billig, 2005). Individuals will often attempt to manage signal emotions such as embarrassment and anxiety (De Sousa, 1987) through avoiding any activity that *"swerves from the common centre round which society gravitates"* (Bergson, 1911: 23).

Laughter is often used rhetorically to convey social messages and if laughter is rhetorical, then so is the refusal of others to respond with laughter (Billig, 2005: 179). People communicate

sensitivities by the refusal to laugh and we often use laughter or non-laughter rhetorically in order to communicate with one another. For example, the target of humour can react with immediate laughter, or choose to delay it in order to signify a lack of amusement, irony or to respond with a witty remark (Norrick, 1993). When groups withhold laughter or find a joke has "crossed a line", they are signalling outlooks and a demonstrating how a sense of humour is structured and guided by social norms that provide systematic ways of thinking about how we can or should act in a given situation (Morgan, 1997).

2.5 Humour and the Social Construction of Emotion

Humour often constitutes shared emotional experiences and cuts a narrow line between agency and structure, reflecting the *"emotions of individuals and their social and political context, a space where the possibility exists to discover or develop creative ways of interacting with what surrounds us"* (Vince, 1996: 75). Our identities, subjectivity and social context are all part of the meaning making process (Fineman, 2006) and organisational humour brings dominant discourses into perspective, demonstrating interaction rituals and revealing sensemaking in action (Weick, 2001). This recognises that emotion is an interactional experience, tied to power effects, constrained and enabled by discourse (Giddens, 1984). To describe something or someone in ways that cause mirth, demonstrates how emotion is tied up in language and conveyed through narratives that give substance and legitimacy to our feelings. Stories, metaphors and jokes *"do more than represent individual emotions, they actually constitute the emotional form of work life. They are alive in social interactions, moulded by the cultural language and conventions of organisation"* (Fineman, 2003: 17).

Dominant discourses shape the actions and emotions of social actors, so that organisational culture establishes feeling rules (Casey, 1999) that act upon the individual to influence and transform outlooks and emotions. This influences humour and laughter, which in turn promotes and suppresses perspectives through the act of language (Hochschild, 1983: 111). Our emotions are *"situated within cultural and historical contexts, embroiled in organised structures and relations of the wider society"* (Collinson, 1992: 237), so that *"the body is directly involved in a political field, power relations have an immediate hold upon it; they invest it, mark it, torture it, force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs"* (Foucault, 1991: 173). Individuals are often less concerned with shedding social convention in order to think and feel for themselves, preferring the shared meanings that connect them to others (Fineman, 2000). Relations of power discretely govern the individual, rendering the *"soul as effect and instrument"* (Foucault, 1991: 177). People may enact power imbalances,

so that their humour strengthens dominant discourses and privileges certain meanings (Watson, 1994). Humour is a *"medium and outcome of power relations"* (Knights and Wilmott, 1989: 538) and reflects the internalisation of dominant discourses that regulate views and outlooks, *"different social circles and cultures differentially prioritise the motives and desires they consider relevant, good, or bad, and those they choose to suppress, celebrate, or liberate"* (Fineman, 2006: 283).

Subjectivity is transformed or reproduced through relations of power that delimit social practices and structure how people manage and express their emotions, so that actors actively monitor the conduct of others and themselves (Giddens, 1984). Emotion is often *"covered over with the trappings of culture and experience and constrained and complicated by the display rules"* (Solomon, 2002: 118). Feeling rules frame the choice of whether *"to be or not to be emotional; to lend a bit of self-feeling to one's actions or to withhold feeling, to be overcome by emotion or hold it in check"* (Denzin, 1984: 277). This process has been described as emotion work (Hochschild, 1983) and face work (Goffman, 1967). Humour and laughter often involve these display rules. For example, something might be said in jest, but generate no laughter, because the audience have perceived that the joke has caused offence and do not wish to be viewed as complicit, even though they found it funny and agreed with the sentiment. We reflexively exercise control over our conduct through emotional labour, so that our feelings become self-regulated and reflect the feeling rules present in all social situations, set within a wider structure of views and outlooks that are communicated and disciplined through discourse (Fineman, 1993: 1). Social laughter is interlinked with relations of power, so that the *"psychological changes that accompany feelings do not tell us about the meaning of those feelings... because meaning is a cultural artefact, something that is peculiar to the personal, social and communicative setting"* (Fineman, 2003: 16).

Humour has an emotional quality and the skilfulness with which humour is delivered (McLeod, 1994: 151) will shade meanings and reality, disciplining people's opinions, actions and social situations (Blaikie, 2000: 115). Psychological drives interact with dominant discourse creating humour that disciplines meaning and helps structure understandings. When laughter causes anxiety, a person will primarily appraise how this has affected them directly and then go on to consider what they can do about it in future (Lazarus and Cohen-Charash, 2001). This interpretation of events shapes the emotional intensity, often facilitating self-discipline to avoid breaking the social norm in future. Emotion plays an important role in the regulation of conduct, facilitating self-discipline (Foucault, 1977), where a person internalises cultural feeling rules, to determine what they should feel privately. Fear of mockery produces *"an exquisite attention to the feelings and opinions of others"* (Smith, 1864: 139) and the

laughter of others is a powerful form of discipline (Bergson, 1911). Feeling insecure, the target of humour will often seek the approval of others (Thornborrow and Brown, 2009) reinforcing dominant discourses and control (Collinson, 1994).

While an individual's emotions and identity are coerced through the internalisation of discourse, this is never complete (Giddens, 1987) and emotion is a resource for people to draw on in order to author unique versions of self (Bolton, 2005: 144). Dominant discourses are often in flux, shifting and changing through a process of reproduction and reconstruction (Fineman, 2006: 273). Meanings can become transformed by the process of interpretation, where individuals attempt to make sense of their social reality. Organizational members help to define the emotional agenda through social relationships (Bolton and Boyd, 2003) and emotion is a resource through which relationships are created, interpreted and altered (Waldron, 2000) so that "reality" is socially sustained and socially changed (Silverman, 1970: 135).

Emotions such as anger and anxiety are constrained and reinterpreted by dominant cultural discourses. Turned inwards, they limit resistance and further enable compliance and identification (Casey, 1999: 174). However, when discourse has not been internalised, this often results in ambivalence. The *"glass cage is discreet, unobtrusive, at times even invisible – it seeks to hide the reality of entrapment rather than display it, always inviting the idea or fantasy that it may be breached"* (Gabriel, 2008: 314). When an organizational member takes "the rise" out of a cultural norm, or uses irony to mask their true feelings, they are withdrawing from the formal organisation (Gabriel, 1995). This will often fall short of rebellion and resistance, resulting in ambivalence and the *"incomplete internalisation, or incomplete rejection, of the new cultural values"* (Casey, 1999: 170). Ambivalence is extremely prevalent in our emotional life (De Sousa, 1987: 277), giving rise to humour and laughter and *"in the absence of unquestioned external guidelines, the signal function of emotion becomes more important"* (Hochschild, 1983: 22), guiding how we interpret our own actions and those of others, unconsciously framing our perspectives (Freud, 1915; 1926). People often attempt to mentally detach themselves from their own feelings. However, it is from emotions that we signal our own viewpoints not just to others, but to ourselves (Hochschild, 1983). Laughter signals *"the circulation of feeling among participants"* (Goffman, 1961: 97) and is instrumental in producing collective moods and understandings (Fineman, 2003). A humorous comment can cause an eruption of laughter when *"repressed feeling[s]…. go off like a spring"* (Bergson, 1911: 69).

2.6 The Disciplinary Power in Humour

Relations of power are often asymmetrical and this establishes the ability of those who govern to control the creation, utilisation and dispersal of specific discourses (Clegg, 1975; Giddens, 1979). Organizational members are in part constructed by the discourses available (Foucault, 1973; 1977; 1978; 1982; 1988) and the *"power to control discourse is seen as the power to sustain particular discursive practices with particular ideological investments in dominance over other alternative practices"* (Fairclough, 1995: 2). These discourses are *"discrete, regular, generalised and uninterrupted"* (Burrell 1988: 21), so that power and knowledge function in disciplinary ways to establish normative control (Knights and Willmott, 1989). This power-knowledge relationship creates "policies of truth" (Fournier, 1999) that form dominating norms and values which reflect the interests and ideals of dominating groups (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000). Forms of knowledge thereby function in disciplinary ways to establish normality and divergence (Thornborrow and Brown, 2009). In this way, the lives of individuals are rationally administered and regulated at a distance (Gordon, 1991: 2).

Relations of power moderate how humour is used and interpreted by individuals. When members internalise dominant discourse, they are likely to use humour and laughter that reinforce prevailing outlooks. Therefore, humour and laughter often support and maintain dominant discourses. Norms are frequently promoted in the things people find amusing and when a member's sense of self is largely constructed through prevailing texts and discourse, their humour is likely to reflect this in some way. Humour is *"frequently dependent on the manners or ideas, or to put it bluntly, on the prejudices of society"* (Bergson, 1911: 138). Humour and laughter are extremely effective in ensuring people comply with group norms and can be understood as mediums of social control and power that help structure and frame our everyday working lives (Fairclough, 1989).

Humour often strengthens dominant discourses, so that people share ways of understanding, disciplining themselves and others through the regulation of outlooks and behaviour. In this way, humour acts as a disciplinary mechanism to regulate self-conduct (Foucault, 1978). While abstract and subtle, humour invariably comments on the social aspects of our existence, providing *"an oblique phenomenology of ordinary life"* (Critchley, 2007: 30). Therefore, it is safe to say that all forms of humour are ultimately related to culture. Humour and laughter are bound to context, *"such that they are both productive of and reflect the circumstances of their production"* (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995: 226). This means that when people joke, they are often passing social comments (Berger, 1997) that influence outlooks and understandings. Humour is *"expressed both by short individual contributions, such as quips or brief humorous*

comments, and also by more extended sequences of humour, involving contributions from several participants" (Holmes and Marra, 2002: 1694). These contributions feed discursive structures, privileging certain meanings and representations. These processes are subtle and often subconscious (Freud, 1905), as the *"rules of humour are the cultural equivalent of natural laws – we obey them automatically, rather in the way that we obey the law of gravity"* (Fox, 2004, 62).

2.7 Shaping Meanings and Understandings

Humour is exercised in ways that provide valuable insights into how discourse and language are used reflexively in organisations to shape realities. Humour is an important way of reinterpreting discourse, as it allows for multiple perspectives and relies on the existence of multiple realities in order to achieve comic affect (Kahn, 1989). This reflects the importance of language in shaping reality (Foucault, 1972) and *"only man belongs to multiple levels of being and this multiple experience of reality is the basis of comic perception... Man's eccentric position allows man to perceive the world as both constrained and open, as familiar and strange, as meaningful and meaningless"* (Berger, 1997: 48). Humour changes the angle of view on reality (Escarpit, 1969) and cognitive reframing (Fry, 1963) can *"twist a current idea into a paradox"* (Bergson, 1911: 100) and allow individuals to resist the internalisation of normative texts. Humour is often used to voice disagreement without causing offence (Mulkay, 1988) and this is often achieved by mobilising alternative or conflicting discursive resources within a playful framework. This is highlighted in the famous work of fiction, Mash, written by Richard Hooker[4], where his central characters resist the cultural narratives made available to them by their employer and tell alternative stories that influence the perspectives of others (Richardson, 1990: 25).

Humour is a key determinant in fostering and negotiating shared organisational discourses (Terrion and Ashforth, 2002). Discourses depend *"upon the interpretation and inventive powers of [members]" (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002: 16)*. Conversations are *"composed of*

4 When Hawkeye and the Duke arrive, they are outsiders, not just in terms of being the new guys, but in terms of their attitudes and sense of identity. They are joined by Trapper and the three build strong relationships through humour and laughter. Slowly, as we read the book we are aware that their sense of humour and identity is changing the culture at the army clinic. As the book progresses, we note that their commanding officer is falling in with their jokes and has accepted this new "reality". We start to question whether it is the swamp men, who are the "cracks" or their army counterparts. This is because Hawkeye, Duke and Trapper have drawn on dominant discourses that counter those of the army. The other Doctors, Nurses and Medical Orderlies fall in with this new reality, as this discourse draws on parts of their own identities formed through their own medical training and collegiate backgrounds. The swamp men behave like professional doctors at all times and as long as their behaviour doesn't effect this, then others question their behaviour less and less, until by the end of the book, the dominant discourse at the clinic no longer draws on "army rhetoric", but instead on the discourses present in medical schools, where young people take their training seriously, while enjoying the light heartedness of their youth.

a multiplicity of plot lines that individuals and groups elaborate, refine, accept, and discard as they seek to make sense of their work, their organisation and themselves" (Humphreys and Brown, 2002: 439). Most conversations will involve some degree of banter, teasing, irony, understatement, self-deprecation, mockery or silliness, often trading on the prohibited, incongruity and the nonsensical (Fox, 2004). Humorous dialogues can be understood as abstract filters (Giddens, 1991) that allow organizational members to create their own subjective interpretations (Thachankary, 1992). Humour and banter provide a continuous unofficial commentary on organisational life (Gabriel *et al.*, 2000), often providing different frames of reference through which different discourses can be perceived (Mulkay, 1988). Humour can be understood as a creative discourse that competes for discursive space within organisations (Clegg, 1989):

> *"Power is exercised rather than possessed; it is not the privilege, acquired or preserved, of the dominant class, but the overall effect of its strategic positions... power is not exercised simply as an obligation or a prohibition on those who do not have it; it invests them, is transmitted by them and through them . . . just as they themselves, in their struggle against it, resist the grip it has on them"* (Foucault, 1977: 27).

Humour and laughter are important to the formation of group identities and dynamically interact with dominant discourses to provide agency, resistance and the reinterpretation of authoritative discourses. Humour provides organizational members a platform and means to help shape their sense of self (Thornborrow and Brown, 2009). Rather than simply creating *"meaning, identity and reality through identifying with or resisting the discursive practices that power evokes"* (Knights and McCabe, 2003: 1593), humour can subvert taken for granted discourses, by blurring boundaries and reshaping them to provide alternate meanings (Collinson, 2004). Discourses are often ambiguous, contradictory and unstable (Humphreys and Brown, 2002). This allows humour to thrive and form sub-plots and texts that create highly subjective and often irrational interpretations of organisational discourse (Gabriel, 1995). Where humour thrives, the informal has replaced the formal, providing gaps for agency, so that *"meanings, perceptions and identities are challenged, dislocated and fractured by narratives that evolve in an unmanaged way"* (Gabriel, 1995: 484). Humorous conversations feed on and contribute to prevailing discursive practices, allowing the polyphony of multiple actors (Boje, 2001) to participate in the creation of meaning (Berger and Luckmann, 1966).

Humour offers organizational members alternative discourse, drawing on the power of the imagination to redirect language and reframe meanings and interpretations (Mulkay, 1988).

Fantasy presents individuals with a wide range of discourse allowing them to generate alternative symbols, connotations and significance (Gabriel, 1995). In ordinary conversations, spontaneous laughter is often generated by amusing anecdotes, stories and real life events (Norrick, 1993). These stories often incorporate elements of fantasy and are usually viewed as harmless escapism that has no material affect on organisational conformity: *"....jokes, sarcasm, and humorous deprecation were certainly apparent, but served only, ironically, as precursors to resumed adherence to cultural norms"* (Casey, 1999: 170). However, values, viewpoints and *"identities are challenged, dislocated and fractured by narratives that evolve in an unmanaged way"*. Therefore, an incident can set off a fantasy that is often interpreted humorously, results in laughter, but has reframed the incident *"to radically change its meaning"* (Gabriel, 1995: 481 and 484).

2.8 Discussion and Conclusion

2.8.1 Framing the Tensions between Agency and Structure

Freud (1905) understood that humour represents rebellion, but not simply in terms of the freedom it provides from the restrictions placed on the individual by authority and social constraint. It is a momentary mutiny by the ego against the super ego that opens *"sources of pleasure that have become inaccessible"* (Freud, 1905: 147). This dynamic between the ego and superego is a metaphor for understanding the relationship between the social and the individual; structure and agency; power and resistance; compliance and rebellion; autonomy and discipline; subjectivity and rationality; formality and informality; all of which are caught in a mutual embrace. We wish to maintain our autonomy and sense of self, while being easily seduced by dominant discourses that structure perspectives and feelings. Our emotional displays reflect this internal dialogue, ego with superego, so that autonomy and discipline are entwined in our very fabric (Zizek, 1999). While we often seek to defend our autonomy, we simultaneously perpetuate our sense of structure; so that the paradoxes embedded within humour frame this dualism, blurring the boundaries between agency and discipline. This explains why a sense of humour is often simultaneously appreciated and regarded with suspicion in many organisational environments.

The contradictions inherent in dominant discourses compete for space, so that humour can help maintain a degree of autonomy, while simultaneously demonstrating a degree of conformity and compliance. For example, emotion work acknowledges the power that exists within all social relationships and is the act of evoking, shaping and suppressing feelings according to the situation (Hochschild, 1979). Our emotional displays are heavily influenced

by social discourses and our performances are socially constructed, so that what we show is not always what we feel (Fineman, 2006). The cognitive re-framing mobilised in humour allows individuals to withdraw emotionally from situations (Freud, 1928). Rather than construe something as threatening, painful or embarrassing, feelings are transformed into amusement. This emotional detachment (Berger and Luckmann, 1966) allows individuals to enact with other actors at a psychological distance (Goffman, 1959), *"leaving behind a laugh and perhaps the idea of a private way out"* (Hochschild, 1983: 23). However, while people often nurture subtle illusions about their own identity and the attributes and emotions of others (Gabriel, 1995), our outlooks and emotions are more or less disciplined through the mobilisation of discourse (Foucault, 1988), so that we often deceive ourselves about our true feelings as much as deceiving others (Hochschild, 1983).

Surface acting allows us to disguise our feelings from others, by pretending to feel what we do not. Expressions are put on and are separated from central feelings and *"around the surface of our human character, where once we were naked, we don a cloak to protect us against the commercial elements"* (Hochschild, 1983: 34). However, by working on our emotions we often deceive ourselves about our true sentiments and our emotive performances are inevitably internalised, giving way to deep acting, where feelings are induced in order to convey to others a desired response (Goffman, 1959). In deep acting our *"perspectives are evoked and suppressed"* through the act of language (Hochschild, 1983: 111) and this is tied to the socialising effects of discourse that saturate *"the working body with feelings, emotions and wishes"* (Rose, 1990: 244), so that deep acting invariably leads to the subject turning in on themselves through self-discipline, framed by asymmetries of power.

Narrow definitions of resistance often do not account for the tensions between power and resistance, and importantly, the tensions within resistance. Traditional perspectives have viewed resistance as a collective act that is capable of destabilising and over throwing structures of power. Humour can be mobilised to elevate perceptual inequalities and protest to levels that challenge the validity of those in authority (Rodrigues and Collinson, 1995; Ackroyd and Thompson, 1999). However, collective and sustained resistance to dominant discourses are rare (Willmott, 1993: 541), because discourses are discrete and encompassing, acting on the individual to simultaneously strengthen values and reduce the range of choices that provide autonomy. Edwards *et al.*, (1995) extended the definitions of resistance to include forms of opposition such as irony and cynicism that are more dislocated, arbitrary and subtle. Meanings are negotiable and humour plays on contradiction and creates ambiguity (Bolton, 2005: 144), allowing organizational members to preserve a sense of diversity, transform relationships and disturb normative texts. Informal power can often gain control and flourish

when there is uncertainty, allowing people to actively contest and ignore narratives, while creating their own versions and perspectives of what is going on (Thachankary, 1992). However, these micro-revolutions (Douglas, 1999) often serve to strengthen relations of power by highlighting the privileged position of those in authority. These forms of decaf resistance often change very little, *"it is resistance without the risk of really changing our ways of life or the subjects who live it"* (Contu, 2008: 367). While humour has the potential to be subversive (Collinson, 1992), organisational humour invariably winds up *"contained or co-opted by the dominant position"* (Westwood, 2004: 777). Cynicism, irony and criticism can sometimes represent a *"twisted form of loyalty…. [or] negative homage"* (Barsoux, 1993: 85), so that even when humour is used to voice frustrations and grievances, members can be viewed as resigning themselves to cheerful subordination and demonstrating their weakness within asymmetrical power relations (Powell, 1988). Those targeted by power are active participants in its production and reproduction (Knights and McCabe, 2003) so that subversive humour often gives way to *"adjacency and edgy juxtaposition, not opposition"* (Westwood, 2004: 785). When dominant discourses are seen to represent reality:

> *"the fantasy of a subject who is decentred, fragmented, and open is underscored by its opposite – a whole powerful ego that enables us to follow wishes and desires in choosing and deciding what one has to do with oneself. This is what we are caught in every day. The breathing space in which we are not-all. With the various subject positions we play every day, actually supporting a self-relating subject. By following this line of thinking, we begin to understand how appeals to desire and the care of self show their limits as potential bases of resistance"* (Contu, 2008: 372).

Humour is often used to sidestep the straight jacket of formal authority that clarifies relationships and promotes social order through the regulation of social conduct. Humour can be used to limit subjectivity, but it also frames how people speak and act, helping to define the limitless possibilities within social interaction (Clegg, 1989). Humour can be used covertly for *"subtle identity politics"* (Fleming and Sewell, 2002: 870), allowing organizational members to preserve a sense of diversity, promote alternate discourses and influence others. While autonomy is imposed upon by dominant discourses, individuals retain some sense of uniqueness and often mobilise discourse to create a coherent social reality and sense of self (Mumby and Clair, 1997: 181). However, one of the attractions of identifying with an organisation is that it reduces the range of choices by confining alternatives and informing identity work (Tompkins and Cheney, 1985; Barker, 1998; Alvesson and Willmott, 2004). Homogeneity and discretion allow people to ward against the uncertainties and anxieties generated by the *"multiple insecurities — existential, social, economic and psychological—*

which intersect and operate simultaneously on workplace selves" (Collinson 2003: 530). Humour and laughter *"are situated within, as well as reacting against, these complex relations"* (Billig, 2005: 180) so that humour reflects both our desire for autonomy and our need to maintain similar outlooks to others in order to defend ourselves from insecurity (Hobbes, 1651a).

People often attribute others with a strong sense of humour because they have a penchant for making witty remarks and making others laugh. However, a sense of humour can also indicate that someone can take a joke; laugh at themselves; smile at misfortune and jest instead of getting angry (Freud, 1928). These characteristics are not mutual and are often context dependent, so that our sense of humour is entwined in the insecurities that underpin our subjective selves (Collinson, 2002) giving rise to autonomy and conformity. A sense of humour can afford a degree of autonomy (Freud, 1928) by acting as a defence mechanism (Vaillant, 2000) that allows individuals to re-frame and manage emotions by changing perspectives (Martin, 2007). This sudden switch in perception liberates the individual by preserving feelings of autonomy and control (Freud, 1928). The ego triumphs via the "pleasure principle", affording the individual guilt free and narcissistic pleasure, resulting in feelings of strength and individualism. This allows individuals to defend their sense of self and maintain views that they conceive as important to their identity and self-esteem (cf. Fleming, 2005). High self-esteem allows a person to widen their focus and take more responsibility (Dreikurs, 1971) and others tend to attribute those with a strong sense of humour, with having other desirable traits, such as being considerate, friendly, intelligent, emotionally stable and perceptive (Cann and Calhoun, 2001).

While humour can act as a defence mechanism to maintain some level of autonomy, it is also mobilised in order discipline values that reflect dominant discourses. Humour is a *"paradoxical phenomenon"* (Linstead, 1985: 741) and the contradictions implicit in paradox mean that humour often reflects our need for group protection from the emotional discomfort that such tensions imply (Vince, 1996: 77). People conform to social norms, forming associations with others to defend themselves from insecurity (Nosanchuk and Lightstone, 1974) and often laugh in company in order to share feelings of superiority and to avoid anxiety (Hobbes, 1651b). Dominant discourses are rendered invisible to individuals who internalise socially established truths about what is normal, rational and sound (Watson, 1994). These discourses discipline organizational members' actions, influencing humour and laughter, so that individuals joke about those things they find irregular, irrational and false. Therefore, humour often reflects prevailing views and shared outlooks, disciplining understandings through the mobilisation of dominant discourses.

2.8.2 Identity is Fashioned from Competing Discourses

Identity is formed by *"a complex mixture of conscious and unconscious elements, an interpretive and reflexive grid gradually shaped by processes of identity regulation and identity work"* (Alvesson and Willmot, 2004: 13). These processes are fluid and often subconscious, giving rise to humour and laughter when individuals draw on incongruities to voice inner contradictions (Freud, 1905). Giddens (1991: 5) elegantly describes the concept of self as a reflexive project that:

> *"Consists in the sustaining of coherent, yet continuously revised, biographical narratives, taking place in the context of multiple choice as filtered through abstract systems".*

Identity emerges from ongoing interactive discourses (Dahler-Larsen, 1997) and is *"crucial to how and what one values, thinks, feels and does in all social domains"* (Albert *et al.*, 2000: 14). It is defined as *"a continuous process of narration where both the narrator and the audience are involved in formulating, editing, applauding and refusing various elements of the ever produced narrative"* (Czarniawska, 1997: 49). Identity is formed from competing discourses and experience in order to provide a sense of security and coherence (Giddens, 1991). A sense of identity *"is understood to connect different experiences and to reduce fragmentation in feelings and thinking"* (Alvesson and Willmott, 2004: 12). However, our sense of self is unstable (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002), partly due to the Freudian contradictions and insecurities that exist in each of us (Gabriel, 1995). We are *"a struggling, thinking, feeling suffering subject, one capable of obeying and disobeying, controlling and being controlled, losing control and scaping control, defining and redefining control for itself and others"* (Gabriel, 1999: 179). These subjectivities provide agency in the construction of identity and our sense of self and *"the role of discourse in targeting and moulding the human subject is balanced with other elements of life history forged by a capacity reflexively to accomplish life projects out of various sources of influence and inspiration"* (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002: 622).

For Foucault (1988: 18), technologies of self:

> *"Permit individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality".*

Humour can become a significant determinant of self-understanding, guiding how we present ourselves to others (Goffman, 1959), in turn creating and reinforce personal identities (Holmes, 2000). While our "*presentations of self are…. in part, products of structural power"* (Paolucci and Richardson, 2006: 333), humour binds and characterises actors at play, allowing people to present shared meanings through their dialogues and actions (Goffman 1959:24). This allows organizational members to constitute identities of their own making (Knights and McCabe, 2003), to *"fashion identities that amount neither to conformity nor to rebellion, but infinitely more complex and rich than those deriving from official organisational practices"* (Gabriel, 2008: 320). Organizational members use humour and laughter in order to maintain their own autonomy and individualism. Humour is often used to express views ambiguously and provides a means for individuals to preserve their sense of self within *"a framework of self-discipline and self-knowledge of their own making"* (Starkey and McKinlay, 1998: 231). Kunda (1992) demonstrates how dominant views are often not fully assimilated, where members deploy humour to form psychological detachment.

Ezzamel and Willmott (1998) found that a congenial atmosphere prevented the assimilation of prescribed organisational identities, demonstrating that *"personal and social identities cannot be read off from organisational prescriptions"* (Webb, 2006: 34), but are formed instead from a wide range of discourse that are often voiced and interpreted through humour, a natural discursive resource, through which people foster connections and relationships, transmitting discourses that construct *"drives, societal expectations, and…. presentation[s] of self"* (Paolucci and Richardson, 2006: 340), allowing individuals to uncover shared views and understandings, where *"individual action becomes recognizable as, and treated as, the action of a collective actor"* (Stotle, Fine and Cook, 2001:388–89). As findings demonstrate (7.2), humour allows individuals to take ownership over the intangible and interstitial spaces that often constitute discursive practices (Van Dyne and Pierce, 2004), affording a degree of agency in the construction of identities (Avey, Avolio, Crossley and Luthans, 2009).

2.8.3 Humour Interacts with Power

My research draws on Foucault's (1977) insights on disciplinary power in order to explore the ways organizational members shape and are in turned shaped by the discursive realities available to them (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). A Foucauldian perspective focuses on the interconnection between knowledge and power and how discourse affects dominance, passivity and resistance, emphasising the arbitrary and subjectivity-shaping character of knowledge. Power manifests in interaction and is part of all relations, privileging certain discursive structures to produce power effects (Foucault 1977).

Power is everywhere and is expressed in micro contexts, primarily through acts of languaging (Clarke, Brown and Hope-Hailey, 2009), which constitute and reconstitute social arrangements (Giddens, 1987). Organisational discourse can be defined as the *"structured collection of texts embodied in the practices of talking and writing"* (Grant, Hardy, Oswick and Putnam, 2004: 3). Meaning is socially constructed (Berger and Luckmann, 1966) and it is the mobilisation of discursive resources that sanction control at a distance through the construction of suitable work identities and conduct (Fournier, 1999). Disciplinary mechanisms lead individuals to regulate their own conduct, turning them into self-disciplining subjects. Under the panoptic gaze an individual "*becomes the principle of his own subjection"* (Foucault, 1977: 202–203). Discourses act as a software of control (Townley, 1989), whereby disciplinary power is exercised via technologies of the self (Burrell, 1988) and systems of right and truth have a normalising effect, creating obedient individuals, who are fixed within the discourses that simultaneously empower and deny thoughts and actions (Casey, 1999).

Power is *"exercised rather than possessed.... it invests [us], is transmitted by [us] and through [us]"* (Foucault, 1977: 27 emphasis added). Thus power is exercised in the way we talk, in what we laugh at and what we read into humorous dialogues. Power is exercised through our emotional labour, reflected in the act of non-laughter, in the feigning of amusement to save face, in the use of understatement and the mutuality of an in-joke. Humour tacitly mobilises discourse, while simultaneously understating the relations of power which act to stabilise social relations. Humorous discourse is a mode of influence (Clegg *et al.*, 2006) that contributes to the reproduction of relations of power (Fairclough, 1995) and helps create meaning and understanding. Discourse represents an invisible hand that acts upon the individual to shape reason and identities, so that people often unknowingly enact out power imbalances, mobilising humour that strengthens dominant discourses and privileges certain meanings (Watson, 1994).

2.8.4 Humour Helps Determine Structures

Agency is *"both the medium and the outcome of the practices which constitute and reproduce structures"* (Giddens, 1981: 27). Humour can be viewed as an abstract discourse that provides structure and allows situational meanings to become legitimate (Clegg *et al*., 2006: 120), interacting with dominant discourses as a sensemaking device, through which organizational members seek to comprehend others and shape understandings (Tracy, Myers and Scott, 2006: 283). Organisational humour and subjectivity are largely products of *"disciplinary mechanisms, techniques of surveillance and power/knowledge strategies"* (Knights and Willmott, 1989: 554). While discourse is dominated by asymmetries of power, this is never total (Giddens, 1979) and although discourse acts to stabilise social relations, it is also a source of social change (Clegg *et al*., 2006). This recognises that discourses are not just constraining but also enabling (Giddens, 1976) and that relations of power must be validated and enacted in order to be sustained and reproduced (Sewell, 1992). Different ways of formulating language will lead to considerable variation in how individuals understand subjectivity, emotions and organisational texts (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000) and humour maintains and changes views on reality, through the construction and interpretation of discourse (Gabriel *et al.*, 2000).

Humour is used in order to interpret the world around us and is a pervasive medium of group culture, identity and meaning (Rodrigues and Collinson, 1995). Individuals and groups will always have some scope to create their own reality, through the social discourses available to them (Humphreys and Brown, 2002) and humour can be viewed as a "discursive formation" or naturalised system for giving meaning to the world (Foucault, 1977), *"rather than a single reality, there are multiple possible realities, and humour, rather than saying reality is manifold, reveals it and presumes it"* (Fox, 1990: 441). Humour mobilises discourses, allowing situational meanings to become more legitimate than those prescribed by the organisation (Clegg *et al.*, 2006: 120) and is an essential facet of language games *"that shape reality and open up space for different concepts and perceptions"* (Clegg *et al.*, 2006: 295).

2.8.5 Conclusion

Discursive practice is constituted in conversations and social interactions, and shaped by all modes of communication, including laughter and this review stresses the *"play and interplay"* of discourse (Smith, 1990: 202), viewing humour as one way that people engage with discourses, *"creating meaning by helping people comprehend one phenomenon through another"* (Humphreys, Brown and Hatch, 2003: 6). I have discussed the instability of dominant discourse and examined the ways humour is mobilized to both discipline and modify dominant structures. Understanding that most comedic exchanges feature elements of discipline and agency underpins a more critical analysis of how humour shapes meanings and understandings. I have discussed the major theoretical works on humour and laughter that shape my arguments and explored definitions in order to provide a rich tapestry to demonstrate interpretations are seldom straight forward and often distinct.

Humour is moderated by relations of power that exert controls over people, shaping identities, determining relationships and reinforcing work meaning. People often view laughter as supportive and congenial, irrespective of whether we are laughing at or with someone and this de-emphasizes the disciplinary aspects that help maintain dominant discourses. Laughter acknowledges the humourist and signals more than just amusement, laughter often signals that others agree with the comment(s) and reinforces outlooks, while de-emphasising the interplay of power and structure.

Humour and laughter operate within the confines of culture, where dominant discourses have an overarching influence on the self (Willmott, 1993). Organizational members are largely constructed from the discourses available to them and their sense of humour is likely to reflect this in some way. However, discourse is unstable and people develop their own interpretations of suitable organisational identities based on the discursive resources available to them (Humphreys and Brown, 2002). Humour can provide members with alternative sensemaking discourses that allow them to author alternate versions of self (Watson, 1994). While agency operates within constraints it is often discursively negotiable (Clarke *et al.*, 2009) and it is this dualism that often makes a sense of humour simultaneously valued and viewed with suspicion.

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

The initial focus of this chapter is to provide a detailed overview of my epistemological and ontological perspectives. I will discuss the theoretical perspectives and practical issues that guided my choice of methodology and explain the exploratory "nature" of my research questions, designed to understand and explain naturally occurring phenomena in the contemporary workplace (Marshall and Rossman, 1995). My study explores how humour plays an important part in constructing meanings and identities, paying particular attention to relations of power and is an attempt to make a *"synthesis that hasn't been made before; using already known material but with a new interpretation, bringing new evidence to bear"* (Phillips and Pugh, 1994: 62). I undertook an ethnography of humour and laughter at the Coop that sought to understand how organizational participants used humour to interact with one another in the workplace and also asked participants to comment reflexively on their use of humour at the Coop.

My thesis examines how humour and laughter interact with discursive structures, viewing humour as a sensemaking device, through which organizational members *"select, maintain, reproduce, and reify preferred interpretations of work"* (Tracy *et al.*, 2006: 283). Central to my understanding is the premise that humour and laughter are key themes through which we can understand disciplinary power and identity construction. Humour reveals the tensions inherent between agency and structure, both disciplining outlooks and strengthening dominant discourses, while paradoxically acting as a resource that people draw on to resist the full internalization of normative texts. The *"efficacy of human action"* (Sewell, 1992: 2) constitutes discursive practices that reveal how meanings and understandings are radically plural and constrained by relations of power that privilege certain forms of language use.

While it was important to formulate research questions at the outset to provide direction to my research, the reflexive nature of my interpretive study meant that I realised that the course of my ethnography could not be predetermined (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). While these questions were originally indicative, I was encouraged that within the *"uncontrollable uncertainties that provide the texture of contemporary life"* (Martin, 1991: 354-355), they remained central to my investigation throughout my time at the Coop, providing direction for my interpretations.

The research questions were as follows:

How do people use humour and laughter in ways that discipline meaning and strengthen normative structures?

How do people use humour and laughter to engage with dominant discourse?

How are identities constructed and negotiated using humour and laughter?

A number of issues required addressing in order to determine the appropriateness of methods and this chapter is structured in order to provide a complete picture of how data collection and analysis was conducted. The first section (3.2) discusses my interpretive perspective and is followed by a section exploring discursive enquiry (3.3). I then examine (3.4) the power within language and discourse. This is followed by (3.5) my reasons for choosing an ethnographic methodology and an in depth discussion of the ethnographic method (3.6). I then discuss the importance of participant observation (3.7) and consider issues of reflexivity (3.8) and textuality (3.9). The sections that follow discuss epistemological issues in interpretive research (3.10); ethical considerations (3.11); data collection (3.12) and analysis (3.13), and finish with a brief conclusion (3.14).

3.2 Interpretive Perspective

My thesis uncovers the ways in which members of the organization came to comprehend, take action and manage their situations and was an interpretive study in search of meaning (Geertz, 1973). An interpretive framework highlights *"nuances of meaning"* and is sensitive to the use of language (Brown, 2004: 98), allowing the researcher to engage with people in order to discover and comprehend *"the constellation of procedures, conditions, and resources through which reality is apprehended, understood, organized, and conveyed in everyday life"* (Gubrium and Holstein, 2003: 215). Interpretive ethnography has been described as "impressionist tales" (Van Maanen, 1988) and *"disciplined reflexivity"* (Weick, 1999: 803). The researcher is an *"improvizational bricoleur"* (Levi-Strauss, 1966: 17) or "quiltmaker" who interweaves interpretations skilfully to produce high-quality research (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). This framework is distinct from "inductive forms" in that the emphasis is not on first order conceptions and empirical materials, but on making *"bold interpretations, on critical reflection and the problems of representation and narration"* (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000: 46). This is a process that seeks to establish the dualities that are embedded in conversations and is explicitly deconstructionist in its approach (Glaser and Strauss 1967),

conceptualizing social reality *"as being constructed, rather than discovered"* (Alvesson, Hardy and Harley, 2008: 480). The framework focuses on how the actors' experiences can be abstracted into theoretical statements, acknowledging the tension between the mechanical application of technique and the importance of interpretive insight. Theoretical sensitivity (Glaser, 1978) requires an emphasis on the situational and ephemeral in order to provide a creative and reflexive account of organizational behaviour.

My thesis used a heuristic framework, seeking to make intuitive judgments, that followed a clear phenomenology, so as to ensure interpretations were informed by theory and recognised that *"without assumptions, concepts and theory, nothing at all emerges as meaningful, as data"* (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000: 46). There is a distinction between genuine interpretation and simply reporting what was said (Cassell *et al*., 2009) and an interpretive study should not simply involve exploration and description (Singleton *et al*., 1988), a *"mass of descriptive material waiting for a theory, or a fire"* (Coase, 1988: 230). Interpretation involves "the transcendence" of factual materials (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996: 46) in order to *"lift data to a conceptual level"* (Suddaby, 2006: 636) and identifying *"a slightly higher level of abstraction—higher than the data itself"* (Martin and Turner, 1986: 147). However, concepts are *"complex, dense, reflexive, collage-like creations that represent.... images, understandings and interpretations"* (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998: 4) and it is important to ensure that the theories fit the data, providing a robust and simple explanation for the concepts. Care must be taken not to be blinded by the theory, so that if the data no longer fits the theory, a new theory should be found (Fetterman, 1989: 18) and *"even if the ethnographer believes that a certain theory is guiding them or that it possesses explanatory power in relation to their data, there is no guarantee that the research is going well", as research materials are "almost always ambiguous and open to a variety of interpretations"* (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000: 47). Therefore the researcher *"needs to be open to emergent issues"* (Easterby-Smith *et al*., 2008: 425), aware that another theory may offer a better fit or provide more fascinating insights.

Interpretation *"involves activities such as reading signals and ambiguous messages in confusing circumstances, whilst maintaining a network of relationships"* (Watson, 1994: 8) and is never easy. The researcher has to sharpen, not dull their intuitive skill, which takes time and experience. It will be difficult at times to grasp the contextual meanings, as *"people do not just passively receive new knowledge; they actively interpret it to fit their own situation and perspectives. What makes sense in one context can change or even lose its meaning when communicated to people in a different context"* (Nonaka, 1994: 30). Therefore, *"much of what one learns at the time is not fully understood and may in fact be reinterpreted and seen later*

in new ways" (Van Maanen, 1979: 548). Another problem is that *"what the researcher is told cannot always be observed or assessed with any confidence as to its accuracy"* (Van Maanen, 1979: 542), so that building strong relationships is key, if the researcher is to penetrate fronts (Douglas, 1976). People laugh and joke in order to give the appearance that they share similar outlooks to their colleagues and to confuse others of their real intentions or opinions. Humour and laughter can have more than one meaning at the same time and the researcher needs to distinguish paradox from contradiction, recognizing *"the relation between sign and expression is many to many rather than one to one"* (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000: 39). This results in analysis "suffused with interpretation" (Silverman, 2000), where quality is achieved by making continuous highly contextualized judgments (Van Maanen, 1998).

3.3 Discursive Enquiry

In order to ensure my research remained focused on a central core of assumptions, it was vital to have an analytical framework that provided a sense of congruence between empirical materials and theory. My ontological perspective supports Rodrigues and Collinson's (1995: 760) assertion that humour in organizations *"can only be explored through detailed, theoretically informed empirical analysis that is sensitive to the local conditions, processes and consequences of the reproduction of humour"*. This recognises the theoretical dependence of research and that *"no study, ethnographic or otherwise, can be conducted without an underlying theory or model"* (Fetterman, 1989: 15).

Discourse analysis provides a methodological framework for exploring the social production of organizational phenomena (Phillips and Hardy, 2002) and is appropriate when *"directed towards contributing to disciplinary knowledge rather than solving practical problems"* (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1998: 253). Discourse analysis seeks to join constructivism with cultural and institutional analysis (Gubrium and Holstein, 2003) in order to explore and extend our understanding of the ways organizational members are shaped by discourse. The focus is on the interconnection between knowledge and power and how discourse affects dominance, passivity and resistance, emphasizing the arbitrary and subjectivity-shaping character of knowledge. Power manifests in interaction and is part of all relations, privileging certain discursive structures to produce power effects (Foucault 1977). Knowledge is *"not something that people possess in their heads, but rather, it is something that people do together"* (Gergen, 1991: 270), it is dynamic and subjective, reflecting the nature and positions of the person who appropriates it (Golden-Biddle, Locke and Reay, 2002). Individuals *"selectively interpret and use knowledge as it serves their own purposes, fits their unique situations, and reflects their relations"* (Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006: 804).

A discursive approach is *"characterized by taking human interpretation as a starting point for any analysis, with a concern for how we socially construct reality around us"* (Cassell *et al.*, 2009: 516). The aim being to describe the interplay between dominant discourses and the dividing practices that make up social realities. Organizational members are *"continually doing social life in the very actions they take to communicate and make sense of it"* (Gubrium and Holstein, 2003: 220) and contribute to the reproduction *"of existing social and power relations"* (Fairclough, 1995: 77). However, people are not passive entities; they are reflexive beings who impose their own outlooks and views on the world around them, creating their own realities (Morgan and Smircich, 1980). Humour is complex and paradoxical in nature (Linstead, 1985), simultaneously resisting and accommodating dominant discourses and can have multiple meanings depending on the subjectivity of actors, who provide multiple plot lines (Ford and Ford, 1995). Therefore, it was important to use a theoretical framework that recognised the *"paradoxes, indeterminacy, heterogeneity and disorganization"* in organizational cultures (Thompson, 1993: 185). My discursive enquiry *"accepted ambiguity as an inevitable part of organisational life"* (Meyerson and Martin. 1994: 121), acknowledging the *"uncontrollable uncertainties that provide the texture of contemporary life"* (Martin, 1991: 354-355).

Inter-subjectivity provides a set of understandings, sustained through social interaction and typified through language. These shared meanings and understandings are influenced by a myriad of subjectivities and social factors that make up the informal organization (Gabriel, 1995). The focus is on everyday social practice (Garfinkel, 1967) and how organizational members *"orient to and use rules, norms, and shared meanings"* to account for their actions (Gubrium and Holstein, 2003: 219). These practices are *"not something that the individual invents for himself. They are patterns that he finds in his culture and which are proposed, suggested and imposed on him by his culture, his society and his social group"* (Foucault, 1988: 11). My discursive enquiry sought to comprehend the meaning humour and laughter had for organizational participants and in the course of analysing interview narratives, I came to comprehend humour from different perspectives, constructing humour as (i.) a distinct and naturally occurring discourse that interacted with discursive structures (ii.) a discourse that I created by asking members of the Coop to comment on these phenomena; (iii.) a feature of multiple discourses that informants called upon to construct their understandings and perspectives (iv.) a construct of the dominant discourses that framed meanings and outlooks within the Coop; and (v.) some combination of these.

3.4 Language and Discourse

My thesis focused on how members of the organization subjectively constituted the discourses available to them and how this was reflected in their humour and laughter, viewing language as *"perhaps the primary medium of social control and power"* (Fairclough, 1989: 3). Discursive practice is constituted in conversations and social interactions, and shaped by all modes of communication, including laughter. My ontological perspective views reality as a linguistic construction, and by studying modes of communication and participating in these narratives, my methodology sought to build a *"general understanding of the stock of meanings and their relationships to each other"* (Richardson, 1990: 24). Dominant discourse *"not only puts words to work, it gives them their meaning, constructs perceptions, and formulates understanding and ongoing courses of interaction"* (Gubrium and Holstein, 2003: 226). Sensemaking derives from these narratives to produce collective meaning, so that *"reality is an ongoing accomplishment…. [where] people try to make things rationally accountable to themselves and to others"* (Weick 1993: 635). Humour and laughter are part of the *"codification of meaning, the emergence of normative patterns.....and strategies of legitimisation"* (Pettigrew, 1979: 576).

People constitute reality through narratives (Foucault, 1972) and in our actions and practice we are *"essentially a storytelling animal"*, innately organizing our subjectivity and experiences into narratives that frame meanings (MacIntyre 1981: 201). Narratives are an *"important symbolic form through which meanings are constructed and shared"* (Brown, 2004: 97) and *"words and language are not the wrappings in which things are packed for the commerce of those who write and speak. It is in words and language that things first come into being and are"* (Heidegger, 1959: 13). People deploy *"narratives to make their actions explainable and understandable"* (Miller and Glassner, 1997: 107) and sense occurs when images of reality are sustained (Morgan, Frost and Pondy, 1983), so that *"human reason is narrative"* (Medina 1979: 30), constituted through modes of communication to explain our situations and life (Martin, 1986: 7).

People act as if these meanings are shared, even though in many instances this is only on the surface and people maintain discrete and different views (Garfinkel, 1967). Perspectives are often fractured, so that the polysemic nature of humour leads to different individual understandings. These interpretations privilege certain discourse and the *"dynamic multiplicity of voices"* (Maybin, 2001: 67) ensure that *"meaning is radically plural"* (Bruner 1993: 23). Individual meaning interacts to construct reality and social knowledge (Gergen, 1994) to form

"particular kinds of representations with their own conventions" (Atkinson and Coffey, 1997: 47).

3.5 Choice of Methodology

My research perspective reflected both the "postmodern turn", focusing on irony, ambiguity and social structures (Patton, 2003) and the "linguistic turn", recognizing the constructed nature of language, identities and knowledge (Foucault, 1977). It was vital to use a methodology that was sensitive to these perspectives, had practical utility and was appropriate for the research questions (Silverman, 2000: 12). My methodology can be defined broadly as qualitative and grounded in the experiences of individual actors. A qualitative methodology is useful when the researcher is seeking to *"obtain empirical evidence of the concepts and plausible models for examining the questions about the phenomenon being examined"* (Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006: 810). This approach develops plausible links between research materials and theoretical concepts (Strauss and Corbin, 1994) and involves *"taking a holistic viewpoint, where context and behaviour are interdependent"* (Cassell and Symon, 1994: 6). As such this broad methodology is a close fit for examining context dependent concepts, such as humour and was motivated in part by the paucity of qualitative empirical studies into humour in organizations (Collinson, 2002).

"Qualitative methods" is *"an umbrella term covering a wide range of interpretive techniques"* (Van Maanen, 1979: 520) and is not itself a *"type of research design but rather it is a type of evidence"* (Tsoukas, 1989: 520). Qualitative design emphasizes the creation of theory out of data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), allowing the researcher to portray more closely the phenomena they wish to understand (Van Maanen, 1979). The wealth and depth of empirical materials is *"rich, multi-dimensional, and complex like life itself"* (Alasuutari, 1995: 42-43), creating a *"flexible, responsive research design in a context that may be unpredictable, emergent and contingently varied"* (Cassell *et al*., 2009: 516). Qualitative methodology derives from philosophical positions that represent interpretive phenomenology versus positivist orthodoxy (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Lowe, 1991), naturalism versus hermeneutics (Hollis, 1994), subjectivity versus objectivity (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). A methodology that is *"pragmatic, variable, context dependent, based on practical rationality, leading not to a concern with generating formal, covering law like explanations but to building contextual, case-based knowledge"* (Clegg and Ross-Smith, 2003: 86) and is *"an instrument with high explanatory power in the analysis of complex themes and multiple realities"* (Gherardi, 1995: 31).

Ethnography is a *"particularly appropriate methodology for addressing increasingly fragmented organisational and social worlds"* (Linstead, 1993: 50). Ethnography is any research that relies on observations in a natural setting that favour the mutual dependence of the empirical materials and theory (Silverman, 1985). An interpretive phenomenology allows the researcher to document the mechanisms through which relations of power are accomplished and resisted. Interpretive research is driven by an informed researcher, who's ability to recognise and interpret hermeneutics is determined to some extent by the theories and preconceptions that they "carry" into the research. The researcher acts as investigator and interpreter, unmasking hidden meanings through theoretical conceptions, so that *"methods cannot be disengaged from theory and other elements of pre-understanding"* (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000: 8). My theoretical perspective revises taken for granted conceptions of humour and laughter and ethnography was an appropriate research style to *"challenge conventional wisdom"* (Johnson and Duberley, 2000: 105). Ethnography focuses on *"interpretation rather than quantification; an emphasis on subjectivity rather than objectivity; flexibility in the process of conducting research; an orientation towards process rather than outcome; a concern with context... and an explicit recognition of the impact of the research process on the research situation"* (Cassel and Symon, 1994: 7), allowing the field researcher *"to arrive at the meaning of actions and utterances"* from the organisational actors' perspectives (Hollis, 1994: 146).

3.6 Ethnography

Ethnography is a multi-method approach, particularly suitable for studying the complexities of the social world, as it has the advantage of being able to develop converging lines of enquiry in order to clarify the various perspectives and interpretations that participants may have (Adelman, 1977). Ethnographic method allows the researcher to "build a picture" of the *"configurations of meaning and institutional life that inform and shape their reality-constituting activity"* (Gubrium and Holstein, 2003: 215). Ethnography doesn't consist of a regimented methodology, instead it provides a research orientation that allows the researcher to shape their own form (Guba, 1990; Smith, 1989; Denzin, 1990). The research design is never static, rather it is constantly changing as it is being done (Van Maanen, 1998) and the research focus will almost certainly change over the course of the project, so that "what researchers have a case of" is often only discovered in the closing stages of the data collection and settled upon in the final write-up (Ragin, 1992). Therefore, ethnographic research creates a significant subjective experience (Fine, Weis, Weseen and Wong, 2000) that cannot simply be understood as a series of pre-determined procedures. Rather, ethnography is a highly improvised and ad hoc practice (Fox, 2006).

Ethnography does not belong to any one epistemological or ontological position (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000; Lincoln and Guba, 2000; Prasad, 2005). My interpretive study used an ethnographic framework that focused on the socially constructed nature of relations of power (Schutz, 1973), seeking to describe and understand member's meanings and the implications that divergent meanings held for social interactions (Gephart, 2004). This ethnographic model belongs to the phenomenological paradigm (Fetterman, 1989: 15), examining the experiences of individuals within a symbolic-interactionist framework. This approach requires a hermeneutic approach to gathering materials, including participant observation and semi structured interviews (with "cultural insiders") to facilitate theoretical interpretations, an *"iterative process of interaction and integration of theory and empirical data"* (Brown 1998: 39).

The ethnographic methodology is *"directed toward accessing cases with rich information about the phenomenon of interest"* (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008: 424), allowing the field researcher to become immersed in the everyday life of the observed in order to get a handle on the essential question of *"what it is to be rather than to see a member of the organization"* (Van Maanen, 1979: 539) and is an appropriate methodology when the researcher wishes to enter into close and relatively prolonged relationships (Denzin and Lincoln, 2003) in order to better comprehend how understandings and motives are fashioned and governed by the social discourses available to individuals (Hammersley, 1992). Ethnography is method *"as active operational procedures, or methods of inquiries"* (Fox, 2006: 441) where the *"the practical takes its place alongside the scientific as constitutive elements of professional knowledge"* (Kondrat, 1992: 239). Practical knowledge is tacit and embodied in action (Habermas, 1971) and interpretive ethnography is a phronetic discipline; pragmatic, variable, context dependent and based on practical judgments (Flyvbjerg, 2001). The aim is to deliver a plurivocal study *"made up of the concepts, beliefs, and principles of action and organisation that an ethnographer has found could be attributed successfully to the members of that society in the context of his dealings with them"* (Goodenough, 1976: 5).

Ethnography involves developing relationships with key informants, using observations to develop informal and formal interviews, embedding the research in the social world, through interpreting participant's perspectives, reactions and observations (cf. Watson, 1994) and can be understood as a subtle form of control, where the researcher is able to get close to those studied in order to interpret their experiences and behaviour, allowing the researcher to observe "patterns of interest" and interpret the "symbolic world" that perceptions and behaviour are located in. For the field researcher and their informants *"particular events take on significance*

and meaning insofar as at least one cultural interpretation exists for what is taking place. From this standpoint, ethnography is as much "believing is seeing" as it is "seeing is believing"" (Van Maanen, 1979: 544). It is therefore extremely important that the field researcher submerges themselves in an organization for a significant period of time and typically, an ethnographer is situated in their study for a year (Sanday, 1979) or longer in order to follow *"an anthropologically oriented method based on close contact with the everyday life [of the organization]…. addressing cultural issues such as shared meanings"* (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000: 45).

The ethnographic design incorporates emerging research questions, that are in some way shaped by initial field notes and interviews that should be "theoretically purposive" (Patton, 2003). This has been described as a ''funnel-shaped'' design (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983), where the research focus pays careful attention to the *"iteration between the research question(s), data gathering, and research claims over the life of the project"* (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008: 424). This requires the researcher to be progressively focused, because *"over time the research problem is developed or transformed, and eventually its scope is clarified and delimited and its internal structure explored. In this sense, it is frequently only over the course of the research that one discovers what the research is really about, and it is not uncommon for it to turn out to be about something quite remote from the initially foreshadowed problems"* (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983: 175). This means that the ethnographer needs to keep an open mind, allowing them to *"explore rich, untapped sources of data not mapped out in the research design. The ethnographic study allows multiple interpretations of reality and alternative interpretations of data throughout the study. The ethnographer is interested in understanding and describing a social and cultural scene from the emic, or insider's perspective. The ethnographer is both storyteller and scientist; the closer the reader of an ethnography comes to understanding the native's point of view, the better the story and the better the science"* (Fetterman, 1989: 12).

3.7 Participant Observation

Participant observation *"represents the starting point in ethnographic research"* (Schensul, Schensul and LeCompte, 1999: 91) and is a method where the researcher *"takes part in the daily activities, rituals, interactions, and events of a group of people as one of the means of learning the explicit and tacit aspects"* of being an organizational member (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2002: 1). I was the "primary research instrument" (Van Maanen, 1988), working alongside fellow members, gaining a close and intimate familiarity with practices in their natural environment. This has been described as "observer participant" (Kaminski, 2004), in that I was not a passive observer, rather I actively took part in operational activities, a participant in my own research, joining in the subjects' situations and picking up their ways of seeing, as I became socialised in the natural setting and subject to the same processes of normalization (Van Maanen, 1977). This definition differs slightly from traditional anthropological perspectives (Spradley, 1980) that define the term as describing all observations and interviews, whether formal or informal. I was open about my research interests, overt rather than covert, informing people of the purpose of my research, the scope and ethical considerations. Conklin (1968: 172) describes the process as:

> *"....a long period of intimate study and residence in a well-defined community employing a wide range of observational techniques including prolonged face to face contact with members of local groups, direct participation in some of the group's activities, and a greater emphasis on intensive work with informants than on the use of documentary or survey data".*

Participant observation *"is essentially a matter of immersing oneself in a naturally occurring... set of events in order to gain first-hand knowledge of the situation"* (Singleton, Straits, Straits and McAllister, 1988: 11), allowing the researcher to involve himself in the *"exposition of the intersubjectivity of organizational life based on the different personal experiences and sense-making assumptions of organizational members"* (Rhodes 1997: 12). As such, it can be understood as a "collective venture" (Van Maanen, 2006), where the field researcher becomes closely engaged with the social setting and its members in order to understand their perspectives (Easterby-Smith *et al*., 2008). The epistemology *"rests on the principle of interaction and the reciprocity of perspectives between social actors. The rhetoric is thus egalitarian; observer and observed as inhabitants of a shared social and cultural field, their respective cultures different but equal"* (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1998: 256). Research design is matched with strategy (Marshall and Rossman, 1995) in an attempt to *"document the world from the point of view of the people studied"* (Hammersley, 1992: 165) in order to

"produce a contextually detailed and polyphonic account incorporating meanings given by local actors" (Brown and Humphreys, 2006: 236).

Participant observation is a collective and social activity and it was vital to develop individual and group rapport, in order to become an effective research instrument (Burgess, 1984). There is *"no one way street between the researcher and the object of study; rather, the two affect each other mutually and continually in the course of the research process"* (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000: 39). It took time to build solid relationships that were based on trust and candour. One of the benefits was that this allowed me to make myself part of the scene, entering in *"an emphatic way, the lived experience"* of organizational members (McLeod, 1994: 89), engaging in relationships that helped to shape my own perspectives (Cunliffe, 2004): *"Understanding is transactional, open ended, and inherently social. The inquirer does not stand outside the problematic situation like a spectator; he or she is in the situation and in transaction with it"* (Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006: 807), providing an embodied and lived experience.

My research epistemology avoided the inherent contradiction in attempting to become a "marginal native", while at the same time surrendering "to the other" (Wolff, 1964). This involved consciously becoming an "insider", appreciating that a researcher cannot study the social world and the discourses that frame it without "being part of it" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). It is crucial "to have been there" (Geertz, 1988), in order to dynamically reflect upon the subjective positions of informants and to appropriate others' understandings of unique situations (Polanyi, 1967), as tacit insights are situational and context-dependent. Minor disagreements can provide vital information and members often mobilised conflicting discursive resources when playfully arguing their point. I had to re-imagine myself at times, to become a "networker and politician" (Deetz, 1996) in order to leverage the knowledge of my fellow members (Eden and Huxham, 1996). The tensions that characterized different perspectives were often the basis for interesting reinterpretations, contradicting my own assumptions and opening up new ways of thinking (Keenoy, 1999).

3.8 Reflexivity

Reflexivity involves thinking about the *"role that language, power/knowledge connections, social interests and ideologies.... play in producing particular accounts"* (Alvesson et al., 2008: 497). Interpretive ethnography involves the researcher attempting to understand social-textuality and this should also include the role of the ethnographer in shaping the inquiry. Ethnography emphasizes *"understanding what is going on in organisations in participants' own terms rather than those of the researcher"* (Bryman (1988: 29), but there remain deep-seated inequalities between the fieldworker and their informants (Humphreys and Brown, 2002). Research is a political activity, that involves rhetorical engagement with the data, and interpretations reflect the researcher's own assumptions, so that *"there is no research which is immune from the effects of the researcher's activities*" (Watson, 1994: 586). The researcher needs to be ever mindful that priority is *"accorded to the perspectives of those being studied"* (Bryman, 1989: 135) by being sensitive about the *"impact of the researcher's identity, experience, and value commitments…. [and being open to] criticism and debate"* (Easterby-Smith et al., 2008: 422). Therefore, the character, personality, background of the researcher should become an explicit part of the research design and analysis (Strauss and Corbin, 1994), to facilitate a self-conscious analysis, that incorporates self-criticism, rather than an authoritative text that appears to provide objective truths (Willmott, 1993: 708). An ongoing self-reflective process that incorporates the researchers outlooks and assumptions, but *"that turns back upon and takes account of itself"* (Alvesson, et al., 2008: 480).

Critical self-reflection provides crucial impetus to retaining a more balanced, considered and complete interpretation of empirical material. Any account is a partial representation of reality, reflecting the perspective and interests of the ethnographer. The researcher must take care to maintain reflexivity, ensuring that he is clear about his own point of view and interests in the account (Van Maanen, 1995), paying a great deal attention to how they think and about thinking (Maranhao, 1991) and the interpretation of interpretation (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000). Self-reflection is an **"**inquiry from the inside" (Evered and Louis, 1981) that enables the researcher to interrogate his own philosophical commitments (Johnson and Duberley, 2003) in order to *"constantly assesses the relationship between knowledge and the ways of doing knowledge"* (Calas and Smircich, 1992: 240). The knowledge of practice is in action (Schon, 1983: 56) and *"when someone reflects while in action, he becomes a researcher. He is not dependent on the categories of established theory and technique but constructs a new theory of the unique case"* (Schon, 1983: 68). Therefore, the researcher must recognise that *"knowledge of methods and theoretical paradigms alone is therefore insufficient for engaging in the craft of research"* (Prasad, 2005: 7). Reflexivity is essential, if the researcher does not

want to *"start with an appropriate and interesting question.... follow a well-constructed method, but produce findings that are obvious or trite"* (Suddaby, 2006: 635).

Ethnography is a *"balance between the competing dangers of an ultra-internal focus that can lead to narcissistic conceit, and an ultra-external focus that curtails self-insight and creative expression"* (Humphreys, Brown and Hatch, 2003: 10), a personal account at the *"end of the research spectrum where the boundaries between subjects and objects are opaque or fuzzy"* (Clough, 2004: 421). As a participant observer, the researcher is a subject in his own study and it is essential to incorporate the circumstances, background and details of their participation (Johnson and Duberley, 2000), allowing *"the audience to see the puppet's strings as they watch the puppet show"* (Watson, 1994: 78). A reflexive framework acknowledges that meanings and interpretations are representations of the researcher's own positions and that the organizational actors' engaged world will probably feel different to the picture presented in the final write up (Weick, 1999: 141):

> *"Fieldworkers can never fully apprehend the world of their informants in its natural form. Even though ethnographers may sense the situated meanings various informants attach to the objects of their concern, such meanings will remain largely exhibits of how informants think rather than the true meanings such objects have to informants"* (Van Maanen, 1979: 542).

However, this can be tempered and minimized by the reflexive researcher (Alvesson, *et al*., 2008: 497), who understands that they do not know better than their subjects (Silverman, 2000). The researcher needs to avoid placing his own experiences centre-stage (Van Maanen, 1988), at the expense of their subjects' realities (Fournier and Grey, 2000) to avoid creating an egotistical and narcissistic account (Bruner, 1993) that is characterized by the paying *"more interest in their own practices than in those of anybody else"* (Weick, 2002: 898).

Ethnography is a journey of self-discovery, where the researcher learns *"how to appreciate the world in a different key"* (Van Maanen, 1988: 118). The researcher does not simply place himself in the field; he creates himself in the field (Reinharz, 1997). Ethnography is an "identity-constitutive" methodology (Humphreys *et al*., 2003), an *"active accomplishment"* (Orlikowski, 2002: 270), where the researcher *"studies others in order to find out more about themselves"* (Rosen, 1991: 2). The ethnographer is a *"product of their participation in the field rather than a mere reflection of the phenomena studied"* (Hammersley, 1992: 2), constantly learning the skills required to carry out the research successfully (Vidich and Lyman, 2000). Research skills are developed through interaction and practice, "an ongoing dynamic process"

(Dall'Alba and Sandberg, 1996) that involves *"learning as a situated, embodied practical working achievement"* (Fox, 2006: 439). This requires the ability to be flexible, intuitive and open (Weick, 1998), as *"the ethnographer who has lost the ability, or who refuses to engage in processes of improvisation, in many ways has foreclosed the possibility for personal growth and learning, and arguably has seriously jeopardized his or her data collection process"* (Humphreys *et al*., 2003: 13). Creativity is vital to this process and an unimaginative analysis can forestall the ethnographer revealing contextual truths and deep insights (Dyer and Wilkins, 1991). Imagination and a sense of humour play a crucial role in this process (Watson, 1994) and a "wryly observant" fieldworker (Fardon, 1992) needs to learn how to appreciate the subtleties of interaction, aware that individual accounts are not necessarily "true pictures of reality" (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995). This requires the researcher to develop his listening skills and curiosity *"in order to be able to probe research topics and informants appropriately"* (Cassell *et al*., 2009: 520) to ensure he pushes data collection far enough (Corbin and Strauss, 1990: 19). Flashes of insight improve with experience and the reflexive researcher sometimes needs to *"break the habits of routine thought"* (Cooper and Burrell, 1988: 101) in order to deconstruct symbols and meanings from the materials.

3.9 Textuality

The rhetorical turn in ethnography *"is part of a much broader movement of scholarship toward an interest in the rhetoric of inquiry"* (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1998: 254). Rhetorical practices are present in all qualitative writing (Clegg and Hardy, 1996) and the way in which ethnographers write about individuals and occurrences creates textual issues (Van Maanen, 1988). This is because ethnography is *"produced as much by how we write as by the processes of data collection and analysis"* (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 239). There are no objective truths, only subjective interpretations and *"any residual notion that a researcher is some kind of independent, objective observer has to be abandoned"* (Stacey, 1996: 261). One way to overcome problems of authenticity (Tyler, 1986) is to disclose more about the author's *"own views, commitments, and social position; becoming a subject of the research in the way other participants are"* (Eisenhart, 2001: 219). In divulging their own personal history, experiences and interests (Boje and Rosile, 1994), the author declares their *"authorial personality"* (Alvesson, *et al*., 2008: 484), divulging *"their personal investments in the research, various biases they bring to the work, their surprises and undoing's in the process of the research endeavour, the ways in which their choices of literature tropes lend rhetorical force to the research report and the ways in which they have avoided or suppressed certain points of view"* (Gergen and Gergen, 2000: 1027).

All ethnographic accounts can be viewed as fictional, as they are crafted in ways that follow literary conventions and devices (Geertz, 1973) and the quality of an ethnographic account often reflects the researcher's "storytelling abilities" (Dyer and Wilkins, 1991). The reflexive ethnographer has to constantly develop their writing skills in order to convince an audience of the *"credibility of a piece of research"* (Cassell *et al*., 2009: 521) and it has become *"part of the craft knowledge of ethnographic authors that textual forms and styles will be self-consciously recognised and explored"* (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1998: 257). The realism present in fictional writing draws on certain conventions to provide authenticity and ethnography draws on the same mix of drama, realism and emotion in order to provide style and tone, using various tropes in order to maintain authority and control (Atkinson, 1990). The writing style often adds a rich layer of imagery that reflects the mood and feel of the moment (Eisenhart, 2001) and the final account is to some extent a work of fiction (Van Maaden, 1979) that draws on the aesthetics of style and structure in order to centre certain images and meanings, while others fall to the periphery, so that *"meaning and its absence are given life by language and imagination. We are linguistic beings who inhabit a reality in which it makes sense to make sense"* (Batchelor, 1997: 39).

Texts are appropriated by their readers, who relate them to their own experiences, so that the *"construction of meaning results from an interplay between the text, author, and reader in ways which are pluralistic and dynamic"* (Brown, 2004: 97). However, rhetoric influences how a story unfolds (Atkinson, 1990). Texts contain aesthetics, tropes and metaphors in order to create *"shared strategies of reading and interpretation"* (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1998: 254). The author draws on these literary conventions to persuade the audience that the text is authentic, credible, logical and authoritative. Persuasive texts have an emotional quality, that engages the reader's imagination and feelings (Weick, 1999), "stirring" the audience (Van de Ven and Johnson, 2006: 804). These rhetorical devices are designed to prevent the reader from formulating their own understanding of what has been discovered (Bryman, 1988), drawing the audience into a *"collective experience.... in which a version of the true is demonstrated for that collective to judge"* (Butler, 1997: 928).

Discursive practices position the author in relations of power (Foucault, 1972). Ethnographic procedures are one sided and the researcher has exclusive control over the research design and the use of materials, allowing the author to discipline meaning. This exposes *"the power inequities that shape a situation, including the research itself"* (Eisenhart, 2001: 219). The accounts are framed by dominant and subordinate meanings that have been privileged from the perspective of the author (Potter and Wetherell 1987). An ethnography evokes rather than represents the social world it portrays (Tyler, 1986), creating texts that privilege certain

representations *"driven by plausibility rather than accuracy"* (Weick, 1995: 55). These tales in the field (Van Maaden, 1988) involve a creative emphasis that legitimizes authority through various acts of verisimilitude (Lincoln and Denzin, 1998) to provide a text that "appears real" to the reader.

3.10 Epistemological Issues in Interpretive Research

The terms validity, reliability and generalizability are founding principles of scientific objectivity. It is important to discuss how these terms can be applied to this ethnographic study, as it is not possible to reduce validity to a concise set of rules or procedures, reliability to the rigour of procedures and generalizability to cause and effect explanations that have been tested to ensure they are statistically representative. It is important to offer alternative ways in which to evaluate the ethnographic methodology (Silverman, 2000).

All perspectives and accounts are constructions and it is meaningless to argue that some accounts are more accurate or objective than others (Denzin, 1992). When using a methodology that favours engaged advocacy, the researcher must recognise the tensions that always exist between *"disinterested observation and political advocacy, between the scientific and the humane, between the objective and the aesthetic*" (Atkinson and Hammersley, 1998: 249). There are no right or wrong ways of writing ethnography and the method is *"sprawling, diffuse undefined and diverse"* (Van Maanen, 1988: 24). The process is more idiosyncratic than rigorous and reflects the researchers own interests and outlooks (Bruner 1993). Even an extremely competent observer is unlikely to report *"with objectivity, clarity, and precision…..on their own observations of the social world"* (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994: 11), as there is *"no way of seeing, hearing, or representing the world of others that is absolutely, universally valid or correct"* (Van Maanen, 1988: 35). Therefore, a researcher can make no rational claims to reporting objectively on the experiences of the "other" (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994).

The final write up is illustrative rather than exhaustive and all claims should be expressed in a range of detailed observations, complemented by actors' perspectives (Katz, 2004). The researcher needs to avoid losing sight of the distinction between interpretive data and operational data, in order to ensure that the ethnography generates operational facts, as distinct from the interpretations and aesthetic fictions that will be inherent in the write up (Van Maanen, 1979). It is important to recognise informant's subjective points of view in order to ensure *"the world of social reality will not be replaced by a fictional non-existing world constructed by the scientific observer"* (Schutz, 1962: 8). This is particularly relevant in an

interpretive study, where the researcher has to ensure that they are interpreting meaning throughout the data collection process. The methodology should ensure that the research *"investigates what is intended to be investigated"* (Kvale, 1996: 88) and the researcher needs to be aware that it is essential to make interpretations at every stage of the coding process in order to avoid producing a *"nice set of conceptual categories that, in the process of routine data analysis, become divorced from both the data and the original research questions"* (Suddaby, 2006: 638). The quality of the research also provides validity and a qualitative enquiry should provide originality, so that attention is shifted to aspects of reality previously hidden or missed, allowing others to see familiar objects and procedures in a new light (Kvale, 1996: 241).

Reliability in qualitative research refers to the *"degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by.... the same observer on different occasions"* (Hammersley, 1992: 67). It is essential to adhere to a consistent theoretical orientation and *"what is important is whether the experiences.... are typical of the broad class of phenomena... to which the theory refers"* (Bryman, 1988: 91). There is a *"connection between rigour in language and rigour in action"* (Suddaby, 2006: 640), so that rigour is achieved through argumentation, augmented by a detailed description of how the research and analysis was undertaken, to provide persuasive rhetorical arguments for the theoretical interpretations (Potter and Wetherell, 1987).

The organization studied is *"an artificially bounded fragment of a larger social reality"* (Katz, 2004: 299) and this study makes no claims regarding the "universal truths" of findings. The epistemology is *"concerned with identifying issues in the areas of interest rather than drawing conclusions about the strength or generalizability of such views"* (Cassell et al., 2009: 519). However, the analysis is built around substantive theoretical logic (Bryman, 1988) in order to *produce "explanations which are generalizable in some way, or which have a wider resonance"* (Mason, 1996: 6). The aim is to produce theoretical findings that stimulate discussion and debate.

3.11 Ethical Considerations

I identified myself as a participant observer to all subjects, providing full disclosure of my dual role, while I carried out my organizational duties, engaging in the full range of activities expected from each member. I worked across the organization and carried out all manner of tasks, always making myself available to help where ever needed. Full disclosure allowed me to step into the research role, when attempting to clarify perspectives through informal interviews. Members were always made aware of my dual role and this allowed me *"on the one hand, to experience the taken-for-granted world of the social actors and, on the other, to be the continuously questioning researcher exposing its hidden assumptions"* (Nandhakumar and Jones, 1997: 126). I worked for FTOP credits and built up a prodigious amount of Future Time Off, some of which I passed on to other members. This activity was acceptable practice within the organization and allowed me to build rapport with members going forward. My openness about my research interests and the assistance I gave others allowed me to foster trusting and reciprocal relationships and a great deal of care was taken to ensure subjects were not identifiable when writing up the data, even when it meant that one or two compelling insights had to be left out of the analysis (Cant and Sharma, 1998). My theoretical perspectives avoid positive and negative conceptions of humour, so that the tone and focus of my interviews meant that very few participants asked to remain anonymous and our conversations produced very little material that I felt should be stripped from my analysis on the grounds that it might have a negative effect on relationships or the organization. This was particularly relevant for full time staff, as their comments often discussed the membership. I spent a great deal of time ensuring that comments were either stripped of any negative connotations or omitted completely, supplying all participants with aliases as standard to ensure that there were no negative impacts from interviewing.

All my participants volunteered to be interviewed after expressing interest in my research and I was careful to ensure that they did not feel pressured. My preferred method was to ask for their email address and then email them to organize a venue and time of their choosing. I made myself available to travel anywhere within the five boroughs, but many chose to interview near the Coop itself. By allowing members some space, many of those who had originally agreed, chose not to interview or could not find sufficient time to meet me within the interview period. While this meant that my interview schedule lasted longer than I originally intended, it ensured that conversations took on an informal tone within *"an atmosphere conducive to open and undistorted communication"* (Holstein and Gubrium, 1997: 116). This allowed me to build relationships through the interview process itself and this became particularly helpful during data analysis, as I was able to revisit with interviewees to gain further insight into their

ideas and statements.

3.12 Data Collection

3.12.1 Introduction

This section provides a clear description of my data collection methods (Savall, Zardet, Bonnet and Peron, 2008). It was important not to *"adopt a naively optimistic view that the aggregation of data from different sources [would] unproblematically add up to produce a more complete picture* (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983: 199) and so data collection was an iterative process, *"building on ideas throughout the study"* (Fetterman, 1989: 92). While in the field, I constantly filtered back and forth between my data, methodology and substantive literature to ensure that data was collected systematically and this section is designed to provide as much transparency to this process as possible (Silverman, 2000: 12). The primary data was collected through sixty semi-structured interviews (3.12.4), which were transcribed verbatim and in full. These materials were augmented by field notes containing observations, ideas, descriptions and snippets of dialogue from the scene, some of which were used to create vignettes or "personal narratives" (Butler, 1997). My ethnography also drew on materials from the Coop's newspaper, "the Linewaiter Gazette" (the title, a "play" on the long queues that lined the shopping floor during busy periods). This newspaper was produced every two weeks and is archived on the organization website. The stories and "member letters" from this publication provided depth to many of my ideas and offered iterant checks against many of my interpretations, as the same themes often emerged in its print (cf. Yin, 1994: 13). The Gazette was particularly helpful to me, as it allowed me to situate informant statements and perspectives within a *"historical repertoire of stories"* (Czarniawska, 2007: 388). Finally, I attended General Meetings to record these "events" and gain insight into what members found funny through shared laughter. This rich source of data became ideal material for my vignette (No. 7), where I provide a unique account of the member community laughing together.

3.12.2 Informal Interviews

Informal interviews enable the researcher to investigate emergent themes with key informants or *"conversational partners"* (Rubin and Rubin, 1995: 11) and were a regular source of materials within my field notes during the data collection period. I worked at the Coop between November 2011 and January 2013, with the most significant period between January 2012 and July 2012, when I worked between twenty and thirty hours each week. I used an unstructured approach to gathering perspectives within my encounters at the Coop, often discussing my research interests with fellow members and then turning the conversation over to them, enabling them to probe and comment on my ideas. This allowed me to gain a degree of trust and to cultivate candid relationships that often led to the person agreeing to interview more formally at some future time (cf. Barker, 1993). These informal *"conversations with purpose"* (Burgess, 1984: 102) provided early observation coding categories (Hatch, 1993: 678), references to stories about the Coop within the media and supplied an evolving picture of the membership, all of which provided impetus for revisions to my initial semi-structured interview schedule (Appendices 11.5.1). My unstructured approach was still guided by my theoretical perspectives outlined in section (2.8) and this enabled me to develop *"relevant categories and properties and [to choose] possible modes of integration"* (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 79), while limiting superfluous data (Silverman, 2000). I was careful to recognise that *"the looser the initial design, the less selective the collection of data…. [the wait] for the key constructs or regularities to emerge from the site…. can be a long one"* (Miles and Huberman, 1984: 28). I had no prior experience and quickly recognised that the process of "putting-things-together" was a "two-way-street", reflecting the *"cooperative and collaborative nature of the ethnographic situation"* (Tyler, 1986: 126) and came to understand and agree with Fetterman's (1989: 49) contention that an informal interview *"is different from a conversation, but it typically merges with one, forming a mixture of conversation and embedded queries. The questions typically emerge from the conversation. In some cases, they are serendipitous and a result from comments by the participant"*.

3.12.3 Vignettes

I kept a notebook to write down observations in the field, note snippets of funny conversations, detail funny stories or events that provided insights previously hidden to me and penned thoughts and ideas that helped confirm interpretations and formed fuzzy categories (Silverman, 2000). These stories and sparse narratives were diarised and contained brief descriptions to jog my memory, providing details of anything I found relevant within the scene (Wolcott, 1995). The best of these were then turned into vignettes, with thick layers of description added in order to recreate the scene. These *"fleeting moments of fieldwork case in dramatic form"* (Van Maanen, 1988: 136) reflected my role as inquirer and narrator (Butler, 1997) and were written with sufficient detail to present *"the phenomenon of interest in its variety and complexity"* (Katz, 2004: 83). One of the problems with field notes *"is that you are stuck with the form in which you made them and that your readers will only have access to how you recorded events"* (Silverman, 2000: 126).

These "personal narratives" provide *"thick description"* (Geertz, 1973) and frame my observations (Goffman, 1974), detailing what I saw; the atmosphere in the room; my involvement; how I interpreted events; and what other members who were present recalled during later conversations or said at that time: *"....by examining my own involvement in the framing of the interaction, and using my eyes as well as my ears, I had kick started my analysis"* (Silverman, 2000: 128). These personalised accounts of my interactions at the Coop provide a glimpse "behind the curtain" (Watson, 1994) and reveal my authorial personality, while ensuring that the reader gains a sense of my experience as field researcher, a picture of the organization and enough substance to construct their own understanding of what was occurring (Silverman, 2000: 126). Finally, I also kept notes on my interviews and this provided me with the opportunity to write reflexively about my experiences as interviewer and researcher (5.). These notes contained problems that I encountered; my assumptions; my natural inclinations as interviewer; ideas that changed my interview schedules and alternative explanations that were omitted (Spradley, 1979).

3.12.4 Semi Structured Interviews

My semi structured interviews began on the 11 November 2011, just over two weeks after my first shift at the Coop. I formulated my first interview schedule from key points within my literature review (Taylor, 1994) and found that I refrained from moving away from this initial template until I started feeling a degree of comfort *"anticipating probes that evoked good responses"* (Stake, 1995: 65). The interview is a type of social encounter (Holstein and Gubrium, 2003), with a focus on trying to understand how meanings and identities were disciplined through dominant discourse at the Coop (Silverman, 1993). I treated interview responses and experiences as subjective facts that were constructed from the discourses available to them, opening up a *"rich method through which [myself] and interviewees, in concert, generated plausible accounts of the world... a narrated reality in which the situated... nature of accounts was to the fore"* (Silverman, 2000: 123). This process of eliciting *"interviewees' views of their worlds, their work, and the events they have experienced or observed"* (Rubin and Rubin, 1995: 35) was consciously polyphonic and interpretive.

The process by which interviewees were identified and selected is made transparent within my reflexive account of the organization (5.) (Suddaby, 2006: 640). Sixty semi-structured interviews took place in a variety of informal establishments, most of which were in the Coop's surrounding neighbourhood (Appendices 11.3). I conducted 58 of these interviews between 11 November 2011 and 01 July 2012. I spent significant time working with two squad leaders and both had become key insiders during my period of participant observation. Due to the nature of their careers, they were not initially available to interview and I eventually interviewed them on the 14 Aug 2012 and 17 September 2012 respectively. I was still analysing my data during this time and I spent some time deciding on how their transcripts shaped my categories. For example, my final interview provided rich materials that resulted in one findings section being re-imagined and written as two related sections (6.10 and 6.11). A schedule of interviews, detailing participant's aliases, interview dates, length of conversations, the locations and who transcribed each "situated narrative" (Silverman, 1993) is provided in Appendix (9.4.). Many of these locations can be found via the internet and some photos of locations are also provided. The total time of interviews was 59 hours and 7 minutes; the average length was 59 minutes and 42 seconds; the longest interview was 1 hour and 24 minutes, and the shortest 31 minutes and 30 seconds. The total number of words was 546,818; the longest transcription 14,654 words, and the shortest 4,447 words; the average words transcribed was 9,114 per interview. Each interview was recorded using a Sony IC mp3 recorder and stored on a memory card in the device; on two laptops; on a portable hard drive and through fear of fire, on line via Dropbox. I wished to transcribe the interviews myself, but

soon realised that this would have a negative impact on my time in the field and delay my final analysis. I had a professional transcription company carry out 31 transcripts on my behalf, while continuing to transcribe, analyse and work at the Coop. I found on completing my interviews that I had interviewed 35 woman and 25 men; 45 volunteers, of which, 9 were squad leaders and 2 were responsible for training. I had interviewed 13 full time coordinators and 2 full time general coordinators. The diversity of organizational members meant that many participants offered insights from their careers outside the organization and the *"interplay between [myself and participants]…. with their gender, ages, professional background, personal appearances and ethnicities…. [placed an] imprint on the accounts produced"* (Alvesson, 2003: 19).

A short period after interviews began, I found that I had too many structured questions and probes and decided to streamline my interview schedule and add emerging themes (Appendices 11.5.2). I had begun to take a less structured approach and this next iteration was intended to add a degree of structure to ensure my interview schedule continued to tap existing and emerging themes. This process was both conscious and subconscious, as certain avenues of enquiry began to reoccur naturally during mutual dialogues, eliciting in-depth responses and conversations. At the same time, other interview ideas began to feel less important and were not called upon with any frequency. I also wished to probe for data to constitute my own interpretations, many of which were jointly constructed during interviews, where a line of reasoning generated concepts and perspectives previously hidden to me. I felt it was important to structure these in some way for my own benefit, as I needed to develop ''probes'' and ''follow-up questions'' to generate rich, detailed and clear materials (Rubin and Rubin, 1995):

> *"However, knowing this in advance does not ensure that as interviewers we will recognise when a response lacks sufficient detail and clarity to warrant a probe, when a contradiction or an unanticipated dimension might indicate the possibility of a follow-up, how best to frame a probe or follow-up, what to do when an interviewee's response to a carefully crafted main question appears completely off the mark"* (Easterby-Smith *et al*., 2008: 427).

These skills are developed through practice and experience and I discuss this in depth within chapter (5.). The various backgrounds of my interviewees added a great deal of colour and texture to my data set and meant that I spent considerable time analysing transcripts, as I continued the next round of interviews (Appendices 11.5.3). During this time, I continued to work at the Coop and began to build solid relationships with full time coordinators, who made up the bulk of my final interviews.

While my early interviews took on a structured approach, this gave way to a far more unstructured pattern of questions, responses, retorts, conversations and meanderings that allowed participants to become less restrained by my own ideas and more likely to call upon distinct experiences and perspectives. This provided more breadth, colour and depth to my final write up (Fontana and Frey, 2000) and recognises that while *"researchers supply meaning to what they hear…. what they hear is guided by the interview participant's decisions about what they think the interviewer is interested in hearing"* (Rhodes, 2001: 38). Emergent themes began to surface and these created areas of focus that I further examined through revised interview schedules, new rounds of interviews and constant analysis of "negotiated texts" (Fontana and Frey, 2000). When talking about humour within a semi-structured framework, I often fell in line with an interviewee's own outlooks and ideas, as this provided a level of identification that brought deeper thoughts and views to the surface, revealing *"multiple truths and shifting identity positions"* (Rogers, 2007: 102) that became extremely revealing and opened up new avenues of enquiry. These exchanges provided a great deal of material and I began to sense that I should further "funnel" the focus of my later interviews (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983) to concentrate on my *"emergent map of what [I believed was] happening"* (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 65).

3.12.5 Saturation

Saturation results from quality and rigor and the criteria for determining saturation *"are a combination of the empirical limits of the data, the integration and density of the theory and the analyst's theoretical sensitivity"* (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 62). Saturation is not always obvious, even to experienced researchers and *"premature departure from the field may well result in data that are only partly analysed and therefore fail to elevate obvious categorizations to a more abstract theoretical level"* (Suddaby, 2006: 636). The signals of saturation *"include repetition of information and confirmation of existing conceptual categories, are inherently pragmatic and depend upon both the empirical context and the researcher's experience and expertise"* (Suddaby, 2006: 639). I still had reservations about my data set, as I embarked on my final round of interviews with those members with whom I had established solid relationships with over a the long period of participant observation and it was extremely rewarding when these interviews provided some of my finest "mutual accomplishments" (Gubrium and Holstein, 1998), confirmed many of my categories and allowed members who spent considerable time working full time within the organization to imprint their ideas and perspectives on the final draft.

3.13 Analysis

This section focuses on how meanings were constructed in order to turn the field data into presentational materials (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 2006). This was a major and lengthy procedure that required a detailed and itinerant immersion into my data, emphasising the importance of writing, evaluation, contemplation, re-writing and a preoccupation with substantive theoretical literature (Atkinson, 1990). This process lifts the data *"by weaving ongoing interpretations, experience, and prior literature"* (Suddaby, 2006: 641). Analysis is *a "pervasive activity throughout the life of a research project.... not simply one of the later stages of research, to be followed by an equally separate phase of writing up results"* (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996: 10-11). It is important to start making interpretations in the early stages of data collection and *"unless you are analysing data more or less from day one you will always have to play catch up"* (Silverman, 2000: 119). It is the constant interplay of data gathering and analysis that lies at the heart of qualitative research and it was vital to find my conceptual rhythm, continuously tacking back and forth between empirical materials and my emergent categories (Geertz, 1983: 69) to ensure that there was a *"close fit between [my] research claims and the data that inspired them"* (Easterby-Smith *et al*., 2008: 424-425).

I had intended to use electronic software (Nvivo8) to analyse, collate, manage and categorize my data (Bazeley and Richards, 2000). However, after some consideration, I decided that the time it would take for me to learn this software, with no help, the other side of the Atlantic from other PhD students and University courses, would probably result in me not fully utilising the software and would in all probability get in the way of meaningful analysis. I freely admit that I find Microsoft Word complicated enough and limited my technological expertise to searching for themes and key words using my eyes, ears and the CTRL F key. I found this to be an effective way of collating, coding and revisiting source materials. Rather than highlighting key contextual elements within text, I copy-paste quotes into a central file and read through them a number of times to locate themes, placing quotes within separate word documents, each containing the file name for that "fuzzy category" (Silverman, 2000), *"consciously [and] unconsciously letting [them] settle against a tableau of meaning structures within [my] own imagining"* (Rosen, 1991: 280).

My analysis focused on the ways that discursive practices contributed to *"existing social and power relations"* (Fairclough, 1995: 77) and how humour was constructed to simultaneously support, constrain and reinterpret meaning (Mulkay, 1988). This theoretical underpinning provided significant *"direction in developing relevant categories and properties and in choosing possible modes of integration"* (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 79), making some coding

choices *"more sensible and meaningful than others"* (Mason, 1996: 85). While theory directs the ethnography, the researcher needs to keep an "open mind", so that the theory only directs the study and does not dictate observations and analysis, a reflexive process that involves *"dialectical interaction between data collection and data analysis"* (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 205) and *"contextual experience, reflection, practice and prolonged engagement with the data"* (Cassell et al., 2009: 521). At times, I became preoccupied and absorbed by a poignant quote; by the appealing personality of a key informant or contemplated ideas that became "dead ends" for far too long, but these cerebrations also facilitated deeper reflections that furthered my study and allowed me to sense what was happening *"in a conceptually coherent way*" (Miles and Huberman, 1984: 69).

The researcher needs to ensure that they separate evidence and interpretation, so that there is a *"distinction between informants first order conception of what is going on in the setting and the researcher's second order conceptions of what is going on"* (Van Maanen, 1979: 540). The first order concepts are the facts of the investigation, while second order concepts are a provisional running record of analysis and interpretations that are used to explain the facts (Kirk and Miller, 1986). For example, informants often constructed humour as a form of resistance, while underplaying the influences of dominant discourses in constituting humour. It is the researcher that *"must make key decisions about which categories to focus on, where to collect the next iteration of data and, perhaps most importantly, the meaning to be ascribed to units of data"* (Suddaby, 2006: 638). While these second order concepts were sometimes difficult to perceive, they represented the goal of my methodology and were integral to my analysis. Tacking back between first order concepts, research questions and literature enabled me to ensure that theoretical interpretations were informed by the research data and offered a good fit for what I thought was going on (Maxwell, 1996). This constant analysis of existing and emergent themes highlighted areas of interest and allowed me to revisit the literature to consider alternative explanations (Silverman, 2000: 12). My adherence to this rigorous analytical approach, formed through *"well-reasoned logic in interacting with the empirical material[s]"* (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000: 7) allowed me to form, mould and inspire the *"conceptual grid"* (Atkinson, 1992: 459) that made up my final analysis and write up.

I spent a great deal of time "turning back and forth" between theoretical literature and empirical materials in order to shape interpretations and this constant theoretical appraisal of research data guided the themes that emerged as I added further conversations to the mix. This movement *"from relatively superficial observations to more abstract theoretical categories [was] achieved by the constant interplay between data collection and analysis that constitutes the constant comparative method"* (Suddaby, 2006: 636). While theory guided my data

analysis, I allowed themes to emerge from my research materials, rather than impose my own themes on materials; *"an organic process of theory emergence based on how well data fit conceptual categories"* (Suddaby, 2006: 634). I developed categories around comments and ideas that appeared to relate in some way, analysing *"the language games that shape reality…. [opening] up space for different concepts and perceptions"* (Kornberger, Clegg and Carter, 2006: 77). This was evident when key narratives took on new meaning, when examined within a new category, as I continued to "turn" interview materials, constructing the dominant discourses that constituted humour and laughter at the Coop (Boje, 2001).

My perspectives and interpretations changed throughout the course of the analysis, due to the inductive nature of the process, so that categories were reformulated and discarded when they no longer fit the data. These "fuzzy categories" (Silverman, 2000) continually evolved from emerging themes (Glaser and Strauss, 1967), as I identified *"salient grounded categories of meaning held by participants"* (Marshall and Rossman, 1995: 114). Subsequent materials became *"grist for the mill of constant comparison to develop categories and their properties"* (Glaser, 1992: 24). Data analysis began in the field, but was an enduring part of my thesis for the months that followed my withdrawal from participant observation and interviews. I was able to reconsider quotes and perspectives and how they fit interpretations, sections and even chapters, with some participant statements moved to provide a tighter fit and to better reflect the context in which they were stimulated (Silverman, 2000). This *"exploration [was] combined with inspection, in which the preliminary concepts that were discovered are successively revised and complemented, while at the same time the empirical items to which the respective concepts refer are turned and twisted"* (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000: 14).

Humour is an *"emergent cultural form…. [that] connects persons to culture, history and ongoing group life"* (Denzin, 1995: 18) and this was reflected in the narratives and stories embedded within interview transcripts. My analysis became a sensemaking enquiry, *"with simple but resonant plots and characters, involving narrative skill, entailing risk and aiming to entertain, persuade and win over"* (Gabriel, 2000: 22). While my participants' voices are reflected by verbatim quotes, my own distinctive voice within interviews remains hidden (Van Maanen, 1979). I acknowledge that I led interviewees down certain avenues of enquiry and when transcribing interviews, I often paused to consider my own statements and questions, some of which became second order concepts that I used to code and analysis materials. My own interview statements and questions were inspired by the views and understandings of my participants, so that meaning making was an active process, often established through discussion and negotiation (Fontana and Frey, 2000). Those interviewees who captured my imagination during our exchanges influenced my thoughts and feelings (Watson, 2000) and

played an *"active role in nominating questions of interest"* (Lincoln and Guba, 2000: 175), so that my analysis fed back on itself and allowed me to question my own assumptions through the interplay of speaking, listening, reading and interpreting, as I continually refined my categories.

Analysis consisted of an interrelated set of activities that often fed back on themselves, but on reflection, I would describe this complementary and overlapping process as a period of listening to and writing up transcripts; deciding on which materials should be used and how they related to my research questions; engaging with literature during sensemaking; going back into the field in order to speak to more informants; confirming or negating interpretations; reshaping materials through iterative checks; refocusing interview schedules; deciding on which personal experiences should be used for emphasis; writing up vignettes to reflect thematic choices and to reflect my journey as participant observer; amalgamating some categories and losing others; coming to a series of thematic conclusions, only to question, reinterpret and integrate unfolding ideas; changing category headings in order to elicit a better fit for first order concepts; searching across my data set to look at how data interrelated; writing up a first draft of my findings; re-examining statements that did not clearly fit theoretical or thematic interpretations; splitting sections that were too large and unfocused; re-examining my own statements; settling on definitive interpretations; ensuring an interrelated set of participant observations were grouped under an appropriate heading, with clear thematic and theoretical structures; then facing key decisions as to which interpretations should be left on the cutting floor, together with the quotes that inspired them (Pidgeon and Henwood, 1996: 97).

My analysis fluidly incorporated emergent themes to provide an ever changing, yet theoretically coherent picture of organizational life, where humour took on new significance through the constant integration of theory and new research materials. For example, a key statement or narrative often placed existing categories in a new light, as evident in later participants discussing how humour allowed them to maintain their sense of individuality by expressing other aspects of their identity. At this juncture I looked at my existing categories, which at the time included, "defence mechanism"; "feelings of control"; "media influences" and "true self" to begin a process of shifting quotes between themes, eventually dropping some, while incorporating others into one of my original categories, "resistance" and others into new categories, such as "sense of humour", "the truth is a funny thing" , "distinct perspectives" and "have you seen the real me". As I discuss in chapter (5.), a key question became "what do you find funny at the Coop?" and this became a new theme once I had begun to write up my findings. The statements that made up this new section were borrowed from

other categories and this changed the shape and context of my final write up of the section "resistance" (7.8), which now reflected how members mobilised discourses to resist the full internalisation of organizational texts. Newer narratives also inspired a section, "why take the rules so seriously" (6.6) and so the process of inductively ascertaining *"grounded categories of meaning"* continued, finally settling down and became concrete as the ink dried and my thesis became bound (Marshall and Rossman, 1995: 114).

3.14 Conclusion

Humour reveals how meanings and understandings are constituted by discourse, are radically plural, and constrained by relations of power that privilege certain forms of language use. My research focused on the power in language (Deetz, 1992: 77) and this was supported by my epistemological and ontological perspectives. The focus was not on generating predictions, but to better understand *"how people make meaning, define, and develop lines of action within their situations"* (Easterby-Smith *et al*., 2008: 424). The quality of research is determined by the application of appropriate methods (Amis and Silk, 2008) and my ontological perspective was sensitive to the duality embedded within humour and was well suited to understanding subjective experiences and positions (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000). My epistemological position recognised the interaction and the reciprocity of perspectives from which organization members subjectively constituted the discourses available to them, with a focus on revealing how relations of power were modified and supported by organisational humour. I have explored the flexible nature of ethnographic enquiry and discussed how my research focus changed over the course of the project. An ongoing self-reflective process that incorporated personal outlooks and assumptions, but *"that turn[ed] back upon and [took] account of itself"* (Alvesson, *et al*., 2008: 480). The emphasis was on interpreting *"naturally occurring phenomena in the social world"* (Van Maanen, 1979: 520) and this is reflected in my choices of data collection and analysis. My plurivocal study used a hermeneutic approach that featured participant observation and semi structured interviews in order to learn the tacit meanings that members mobilised through humour (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2002).

4. The Organization

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide an evocative account of the organization (Richardson, 2000), discussing the enterprise in enough detail to ground the reader in the dominant discourses that permeate the member community[5]. I will explain the history of the cooperative movement, situating the Park Slope Food Coop (the Coop) and its core ideologies within a wider system of beliefs. This recognises that an organization's identity, structures and dominant values are a reflection of cultural historical development (Kieser, 1994). The cooperative movement is a "social enterprise" that draws on human connectedness in ways that socially construct relations of power, feeding member dialogues and shaping identities. The Coop has a strong sense of organizational identity and this is due largely to dominant discourses that have maintained and nurtured values that can be directly related to the Rochdale Principles of 1844 (4.4). These organizational texts shape members' outlook, but at the same time, are *"open to continuous modification through discourse"* (Stryjan, 1994: 65). Members can draw on competing discourse to construct identities based on engagement, identification, sense of control and self-esteem (Rothschild-Whitt and Whitt, 1986) and this is evident in how humour and laughter are mobilised to comprehend outlooks and discourses in ways that help shape and enrich the organization.

4.2 Food Cooperatives

Cooperative is defined as *"an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise"* (International Cooperative Alliance, 2011). The Coop is one of four cooperative grocers in New York (the others are in the East Village, Flatbush and Forte Greene) and one of the hundred and twenty two members of the National Cooperative Grocers Association in the United States. These social institutions are built around the mutuality and interests of their members, inviting people to find a common solution to healthy and affordable food by linking *"individual fulfilment to the support and cooperation of others"* (Restakis, 2010: 239). These organizations have been described as "democracy in action" (Nadeau, 2012); "community pacts" (Gherardi and Masiero, 1987); "contrabureaucratic organizations" (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979); "a third way" (Rosner, 1991)

5 I detail how I gained access to the organization and developed relationships with key informants in chapter (9.), recognizing that *"access is not just a matter of walking through the door – it is an ever present, ongoing concern, which includes inventing yourself as an ethnographer"* (Rachel, 1996: 124).

and “social economies” (Restakis, 2010). The member countries of the United Nations nominated 2012 as the International Year of Cooperatives, recognizing the importance of the thousands of cooperatives around the world. In the United States there are over 30,000 of these organizations, employing 900,000 people, with some 350 million members, making them an important part of the US economy and society (Nadeau, 2012). The largest consumer cooperatives in the USA have millions of members.

Most food cooperatives are small scale enterprises that follow the “place-based ownership model” (Imbroscio, Williamson and Alperovitz, 2003), where the organization is owned and controlled by a local community. In the USA, these coops have a combined 700,000 members and employ 14,000 fulltime (Nadeau, 2012). They are classed as consumer cooperatives, the most common type of coop in the United States. The others are producer coops (farmers and independent producers), employee owned coops (paid employees direct the organization), multi-stakeholder coops (owned and controlled by different interest groups e.g. consumers and employees) and macro level cooperative, composed of companies, non-profit organizations and government agencies. While a relatively small part of the economy, food cooperatives have had a major influence on buying habits in the United States. They were the first large-scale stores to introduce nutritional labelling, indicate sell-buy dates and provide the underlying unit cost on products. They have also played an active role in consumer protection, through selective merchandising, education, lobbying and boycotts. These organisations once dominated organic food and beverage sales, where their influence has helped generate the huge US market for these products, valued at $23 billion in 2008; increasing to $81 billion in 2012 and set for further increases in 2014 (Food Navigator, 2014).

4.3 The Park Slope Food Cooperative (the Coop)

As you approach the Coop (Appendices 11.2), you notice people gathered around the front entrance, conversations abound, some members have bumped into friends, others chat on the bench outside the sliding glass doors, others stand with their shopping, waiting for a lift home. Strangers discuss what is in each other’s shopping bags, what is in season and how best to blanch chard. Members, in “high-viz” jackets, are waiting to walk shoppers to their transport or homes; before returning the shopping trolley to the store. They smile and chat, while they wait for a member pushing a cart of boxed and bagged groceries to leave from the confines. You are struck by the sociality; there is a sense that this is “no ordinary grocery store”. In New York City and beyond, the Coop is an organization that has permeated the collective consciousness, after featuring regularly in newspapers, online magazines and television. The reason it piques so much interest, is that it is an organization apart. In a landscape dominated

by private interest and corporate ideals, the Coop is a social endeavour that is predicated on the hard work of its members and "alternative" ideals that are maintained through dominant discourse, supported by organizational structures and guarded by its stewards.

An "institution of local lore" (Jochnowitz, 2001), the Coop is approaching its' 40th anniversary and dates back to 1973, when a small group of founding members decided to operate a buying service that would provide healthy and affordable food to anyone who became a member. The Coop has grown into a 16,500 strong organization that carries a wide variety of products at only 21% above wholesale and is well known for the high quality local, organic and conventionally grown produce that it stocks. The Coop once opened only in the evenings and on weekends, but has steadily grown into a multimillion dollar business with an annual turnover of $50,000,000. The Coop started life in 1973 on the 2nd floor of a community centre (now the organizations offices and meeting rooms). Four years later, with a membership of 1000, the Coop took over the lease for the entire building, with an option to buy two years later (this lead to the first collection of members' investment money). By the late 1990s, with a membership of around 6,500, the Coop purchased the building next door in order to expand the premises square footage. Previously the store front for a rug store, this now provides the brick front for the entrance, with the green neon sign announcing the organization's presence in the neighbourhood. The organization is mandated to serve the member community and this includes minimising any negative impact on society. This is in part due to its policy (agreed upon by the membership) of stocking products that are not harmful to the environment and carrying an environmentally superior product whenever it is comparable in terms of price and quality.

A person joining the Coop is required to pay a one-off fee, deposit an investment of $100 into the Coop's account and attend an orientation. These investments are important for operating costs, but also facilitate a member's claim to having equal ownership of the organization and equal say in how their cooperative is run. An orientation acts as a vehicle for the transmission of the organization's core values, policies and procedures (Wolf, 2009)[6]. These formative messages structure how a new member perceives their role within the organization (Gundry and Rousseau, 1994). The purpose of the orientation is to *"enable the new volunteer to understand what will be asked of him or her and to explain the organization's rules and procedures so that the new member's contribution can commence…. [and] to establish from*

6 *"Membership is open to all, but only members may shop and work at the Coop. Membership in the Coop means that you have been to an Orientation, provided a valid photo ID and proof of address, and chosen a work slot"* (Park Slope Food Coop Membership Manual).

the very outset an attitude towards the organization which will develop trust, loyalty, cooperation and flexibility (Wilson and Pimm, 1996: 32)[7]. The Coop's success is due to a number of factors, including the changing, but consistent demand in the surrounding neighbourhoods for healthy and organic food; the continued energy and fervent belief of members committed to the Coop's ideals, including founder members who continue to provide a guiding influence in the organization. There is a substantial demand for high quality produce in New York and the Coop has helped lead the way in providing organic, local, sustainable and minimally treated groceries[8].

The present membership stands at an aisle bulging 16,500 and lack of physical space is one of the issues facing the organization. This is emphasised by the lack of room during busy shopping times and by the brisk turnover, which means that inventory is continually replenished throughout the day. The organization's success story is providing a model for imitation and support for new food coops; including one in neighbouring Fort Greene, Brooklyn, which may alleviate issues surrounding membership saturation. One of the organizational goals is to provide high quality products, at lower prices and this is achieved primarily through the cost savings that a voluntary labour force provides. A recent price comparison survey undertaken by the membership indicated that Coop members can save as much as 40% off of their weekly grocery bill. Volunteers carry out around 75% of the organization's work requirements, with many carrying out their duties in the same squad each month, providing a contact point for members to develop relationships. Volunteer members are responsible for the everyday operating of the store; receiving, food handling, stocking, pricing, checkout, cashier, office work and cleaning. While other members take care of social agendas, training and governance; orientations, accounting, legal, newspaper and committees. All receive a work credit for the time they put in and many volunteers have a stock of work credits, demonstrating that they are motivated by more than just the benefits of high quality, low cost food.

Many cooperative grocers operate a two tier system that allows non-members to shop at higher prices. However, the Coop is a highly participatory cooperative business, where collective action is emphasized by the important rule that voluntary members have to work a 2 ¾ hour

7 *"Working together builds trust through cooperation"* (As approved by the June 1992 General Meeting, Park Slope Food Coop Membership Manual).

8 *"My Vitamix changed my life"* (New York Observer: Love among the kale: the park slope food coop hosts a singles mixer, 11/16/2011).

shift each month to maintain their privileges[9]. Many members regularly arrive for their scheduled monthly shift, but life constraints make it difficult for others to accommodate their work commitment each month. Each squad will have members missing as a result and this was threatening the Coop's ability to function[10]. As a result, members voted for the somewhat controversial 2:1 make up rule, where a squad leader has the discretion to require a volunteer to work two shifts for the one they missed. This serves as a motivation to members to manage their time and arrive when expected and also means that all squads are augmented to some extent, by members "making up" for missing a shift. All members working sign in and a great deal of administration is spent ensuring that a member's work commitment is being fulfilled. When a member misses their work slot, they must make up their work commitment within the following four weeks; otherwise they face the possibility that their membership status will be suspended[11]. This balance between individual and collective needs can cause some tension and there is little doubt that some members feel like they are pressured into volunteering by the threat of sanction (Powers, 1998)[12]. However, there are contingencies available and these reflect the organizations ethical commitment to its members (Rotolo and Wilson, 2004). For example, members can apply for absence due to disability; temporarily swap shifts with another member; attend a general meeting for credit and take a whole year off for maternity[13].

9 *"The Park Slope Food Coop, in Brooklyn, is known for its rules: organic and nonorganic products must not touch; long vegetables must be displayed lying parallel to the aisles. But perhaps no rule is more sacred than the requirement that to shop at the Coop, each member must volunteer a certain amount of time there, typically 2 hours and 45 minutes every four weeks. Shirkers are penalized by having to work twice the amount of time they missed"* (New York Times: At a Food Coop, a Discordant Thought: Nannies Covering Shifts, 02/18/2011).

10 *"Members in the 1970s decided on the two for one make-up rule because nobody was showing up for their shifts, causing the food coop to shut down for a brief period"* (Making up with the Coop, The Linewaiters Gazette, 01/ 26/2012).

11 *"The Coop, a place that raises aspirations for society, makes us raise aspirations for ourselves. I am still suspended, but imagine myself someday returning and remaining in good standing. Nostalgically, I envision old friends and former roommates in the aisles, examining the white nectarines"* (New York Times: Flunking Out at the Food Coop, 10/25/2012).

12 The double make-up policy *"is not intended as a punishment, but as an incentive for members to show up for their regular shifts, when they are expected and needed, rather than do unscheduled make-ups"* (Park Slope Food Coop Membership Manual).

13 *"For the record, the most shifts owed medal of distinction is held by a couple who owed in the high twenties, but were too busy to be interviewed at the time of publication and wondered if they could do it next time"* (Making up with the Coop, The Linewaiters Gazette, 01/ 26/2012).

4.4 A History of Cooperation

While they can be understood as alternative organizations, cooperatives have been active in the United States for a long time. Ben Franklin established a cooperative in 1752 and there have been food cooperatives operating since the late 19th century, some of which still exist today (McEvily and Ingram, 2004). These organizations provided a libertarian and communitarian alternative to capitalism, based on the seven Rochdale Principles (Labov, 1990):

> *"Much has been written about Rochdale and the name has now acquired a semi-mythical status in the cooperative corpus. All movements need their symbols and Rochdale is one"* (Restakis, 2010: 36).

The Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers was formed in England, in 1844, by a group of 28 textile workers. Motivated by their abject poverty and poor living conditions, they decided to start a cooperative business, where members would have equal ownership and democratic control. This was founded on *"a common impulse to forge an alternative and a growing class consciousness and self-confidence on the part of working people. All attempted to realize some socialised form of the ideal community"* (Restakis, 2010: 32). The Rochdale cooperative was constructed on principles that shifted *"the focus from the creation of socialised communities as the means to reform society to the transformation of market relations in the service of social ends"* (Restakis, 2010: 36). The Coop while continually evolving, still largely adheres to the founding principles of the Rochdale Pioneers in the 19th century; open and voluntary membership for a nominal fee; democratic control; equal representation; customers are all members; savings are passed directly to the membership; operating margins result in no surplus profits (Hammond, 1987). Therefore, the Rochdale Principles established the modern conception of a cooperative.

The 1970s saw the emergence of a counterculture, which rejected bureaucratic control in favour of authority that resided with the collective. This "civic generation" contributed to an increase in volunteering *"inspired by values of social responsibility and mutual action"* (Rotolo and Wilson, 2004: 1097). This movement resulted in "alternative organizations" that were *"at least somewhat in opposition to the mainstream"* (Cheney, 1995: 171), by establishing themselves as "egalitarian collectives", that were member owned, operated democratically and without hierarchy (McEvily and Ingram, 2004). Contemporary food cooperatives had strong links with these alternative, student and environmental movements, but rather than developing a radically new form of organization (Imbroscio, Williamson and

Alperovitz, 2003), these cooperatives embraced the Rochdale principles as part of their central ideology, *"as a perfectly logical response to the demand among young radicals for the goods and services necessary for living a life outside the established economic system"* (Cox, 1994: 4).

While the social landscape that preceded the establishment of the Rochdale cooperative in 1844 was very different to the new radical culture that helped establish the Coop in Park Slope, the organizations humble beginnings can be related to those of Rochdale, in that the organization has grown from a hand full of members, to be regarded as a flag bearer of food cooperatives growing around the city, country and world. This is because of its success and also because the organization has, it claims, remained true to its founding principles, avoiding many of the mistakes that other food cooperatives have made. The resurgence in consumer food cooperatives in the United States during the 1970s was matched by their subsequent decline in the 1990s (a period of history when social and political ideals became centred on the individual, success ethic and capitalism). Those food cooperatives that survived often drifted away from their founding ideologies, becoming "less cooperative", and more centred on natural food, convergent with the capitalist norms of wider society (Hadley and Goldsmith, 1995). For example, while other coops decided it would be more efficient to do away with member labour, the Coop membership felt that member labour was essential in keeping down costs and maintaining the core values of the Coop (Founder Joe Holtz, radio interview, 2011)[14].

Discourses in wider society influence the running of all organizations and internal discussions regarding maturity; professionalism; appropriateness; efficiency; accountability; controls and growth can be extremely seductive. These discrete discourses provide systems of "bounded rationality" (March and Simon, 1958), where uncertainties and constraints are often resolved by conforming to structures and beliefs that prevail in wider society (Scott, 1995). Many food cooperatives morphed into much more bureaucratic models, adopting the business strategies used by their for-profit competitors (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983), developing top-down management and goals indistinguishable from those of for-profit organizations (Wood, 1992). Organizationally, they deemphasized member work and participation, encouraged non-member shopping, hired general managers to intercede between the board and the workers,

14 *"The members-only Park Slope Food Coop takes the "hippie coop" stereotype—brown rice and granola, blackstrap molasses and herbal teas—and stands it upside down". "Founded in 1973, the Coop has survived a generation of similarly idealistic peer institutions by responding to the neighborhood's ongoing evolution, adding luxury items alongside kitchen staples"* (The shopping profile in NYMag.com).

and introduced hierarchy and bureaucracy to govern those workers (McEvily and Ingram, 2004: 11):

> *"Almost all coops initially employed an organizational design that reflected cooperative ideals. Its key characteristic was member participation in the work and decision making of the coop. Most coops required shoppers to be members. All encouraged members to work in the coop, and some required it. Participation in decision making occurred through boards of directors that were active in the day-to-day governance of the coop, and responsive to concerns and suggestions from other members"* (McEvily and Ingram, 2004: 10).

This "constitutional degeneration" (Cornforth, Thomas, Lewis and Spear, 1988) meant that many food cooperatives lost their sense of organizational identity in the scramble to become more like conventional supermarkets. However, this period of ideological erosion ended in the 1990s, soon after large for-profit organizations, such as "Whole Foods" and "Wild Oats" moved into the natural foods market and threatened their viability, *"essentially bringing the ideology out of the closet to which it had been relegated"* (McEvily and Ingram, 2004: 24). The regeneration of food cooperatives (Cornforth, 1995) has involved a renewed emphasis on cooperative tenants and community. For example, discourse on the practice of member work has shifted from *"an inefficient anachronism (a political artifact left over from the mid-seventies) and an obstacle to the smooth operation of stores…. [to] member work is important both for controlling costs and for building attachment to the coop*" (McEvily and Ingram, 2004: 17).

The Coop can be understood as a "foundational" cooperative (Gherardi and Masiero, 1987), as it has always retained the common ideals of its founding members[15]. This has had an important bearing on the organizations identity and development (Hadley and Goldsmith, 1995). The Coop's foundation and subsequent success has fostered a strong belief in cooperative ideology and this is supported by a competent management team, committed to ensuring these principles are not corroded. This has been critical in avoiding "degeneration" (Stryjan, 1994) of organizational beliefs and this is reflected by the many members who identify with core discourses and dedicate time and effort in service of these beliefs, to the benefit of the community (Nadeau, 2012):

15 *"Historical factors such as the particular network of people, place and circumstances present at the cooperatives inception are likely to be reflected in its structures, processes and pattern of development"* (Gherardi and Masiero, 1987: 326).

> *"The group of our founders did not have uniformity around politics, but we had uniformity in our belief that there was too little cooperation in the world. We were determined to start this coop, because we believed in the beauty and the power of people working together for the collective good"* (Founder and General Manager; Joe Holtz, 2003: 5).

This foundation has been crucial to how the organization has developed (Hadley and Goldsmith, 1995) and is echoed in a myriad of conversations, embedded in the discourse of community action. These organizational texts simultaneously acknowledge the importance of volunteers, both now and in the past to provide valued identities; *"the social actualization of its genesis and historical development, where social actors, in a historical setting, produce intersubjectively the social construction of reality"* (Gherardi and Masiero, 1987: 326). Members are asked to "go beyond" casual association with the organization. Rather than simply satisfying their grocery needs, dominant discourse requires that members have a personal commitment to this community, through which "we" can gain a sense of accomplishment and gratification from "our cooperative". A member's sense of ownership is strengthened from working cooperatively and this personal commitment allows them to engage with the cooperatives values and principles and fosters feelings of equality and camaraderie (Holtz, 2003)[16].

16 *"A productive, egalitarian place where anyone can pick up an intercom receiver and inquire, "Do we have anymore unsulfured dried apricots?"* (New York Times: Flunking Out at the Food Coop, 10/25/2012).

4.5 Organization Identity

The Coops' reliance on volunteers has created strong social cohesion amongst members, forming a robust organization that promotes camaraderie and connectedness (Shin and Kleiner, 2003)[17]. The organization is committed to substantive values that *"exert an influence over all decisions made in the organization, because they comprise both the premises for future actions and the reciprocal obligations among [members]"* (Gherardi and Masiero, 1987: 330). These enduring values are central to the organizations identity and are often matched by the outlooks of members who perceive these dominant views as important to their own identities (Dutton, Dukerich and Harquail, 1994):

> *"The activities of the coop people as they ordered, collected and distributed food, exchanged information and views at meetings, formed a collective style which was pragmatic and informal as well as cooperative. These characteristics can also be viewed as themes in an ideology, outlining the behavior expected of coop people"* (Labov, 1990: 140).

The Coop is part of and supports the cooperative movement, connecting members to a wider structure of ideals, from which the organization has developed a strong ideology and culture. While other cooperatives began to "lose their cooperativeness" over the last two decades (McEvily and Ingram, 2004), the Coop and its membership have embraced its principles in a way that demonstrates a "strong sense of self" in the face of external influences and this has invigorated subsequent joiners to uphold the founding principles, in ways that shape their understanding of what it is to be a "true" member; *"ideals are definers of aspirations, they are judgments upon us"* (Selznick 1966: 10-11). The organization is:

> *"....grounded in its members' values and passions and sustained by the bonds of trust that develop within and between them. They are the organizational expression of their members' ethical stance toward the world; non-profit organizations, by way of their very existence and practices, convey a public statement of what their members see as a better, more caring, or more just world"* (Rothschild and Milofsky, 2006: 137).

17 *"The complex role of member-as-worker-as-owner-as-shopper helps most of us develop an identity that includes truly caring about our Coop"* (As approved by the June 1992 General Meeting, Park Slope Food Coop Membership Manual).

The Coop is defined by its goal of providing high quality, healthy, environmentally sound goods to its members, through "*being in harmony with other human beings rather than competitive"* (McEvily and Ingram, 2004: 17). Media coverage has helped create greater political consciousness about environmental concerns and as a result the degradation of the natural environment has become a key issue in society (Yearley, 1996). Members' draw on this discourse to internalise ways of comprehending food and this is reflected in the Coops' sound environmental policies. This discourse permeates the organization and it is normal to hear members share knowledge and opinions on these issues, so that the organization becomes a *"public arena in which social problems are framed and grow"* (Hilgartner and Bosk, 1988: 58). These networks of conversations feed on and contribute to discourses (Ford and Ford, 1995) that provide structure to how people perceive business activities and their impact on the environment and personal health (Bell, 1994). Issues such as organic labelling, the cyanide found in rice products and the benefits of seasonal produce are regularly discussed in the Coop newspaper, and topics such as reducing plastic bags at the store and using electricity from wind sources are issues discussed at general meetings. One of the benefits of shopping at the Coop, is that you can be assured that the items you put in your grocery bag have been vetted through the organization's policy of stacking products that are healthier and have less environmental damage:

> *"In its layout, the Coop very much resembles any other small supermarket, with aisles of foodstuffs and food accessories in packages and bulk. Anyone will tell you, however, that the Coop is more than just a store, because of the cooperative manner in which the business runs, and because of the foods and products that it selects to stock, the Coop is very much an expression of the beliefs and values of its founders and current members"* (Jochnowitz, 2001: 56).

There is a sense that dominant meanings and understandings have developed organically and that these are important to the continued success of the organization. The Coop's strong identity is a result of the defining principle that differentiates the store from other cooperatives and this is supported by a strong sense of congruence between organizational goals, structures and strategies. This presents a "distinct coop idea" (Gherardi and Masiero, 1987: 324) that has helped establish the importance of voluntary contributions to cooperative organizations (Oppenheimer, 1998)[18]. Voluntary effort is critical to how the Coop identifies itself as a more

18 *"At the Park Slope Food Coop, by offering only one deal, which is simply called membership, I think we clear the way for a higher level of involvement and commitment" "work can enhance the possibility of a sense of caring, of pride and of ownership"* (Park Slope Food Coop Membership Manual).

"involved, discursive and democratic" form of organization that exists for the benefit of society and its membership (Rothschild and Milofsky, 2006):

> *"Forging stronger ties to members requires asking more, not less of them. Increasing member involvement has the dual benefits of strengthening the boundary between the coop and the environment, and increasing member commitment"* (McEvily and Ingram, 2004: 16-17).

Many members come to feel a strong sense of identification with dominant outlooks at the Coop, so that they become less likely *"to think of the Coop as an entity outside of themselves"* (Holtz, 2003: 4)[19]. As a result the Coop's founding principles have endured, with subsequent generations of membership able to identify with the organization. Members, who identify with the organization, subscribe to shared views and norms, in ways that regulate outlooks and maintain a collective identity (Finkelstein and Penner, 2005). This synthesis of member and organizational beliefs results in prolonged relations (Miller, Powell, and Seltzer, 1990), with some members continuing to volunteer past the 25 year rule. On some level, social control is achieved through the self-selecting nature of alternative organizations, with many full time and long-standing voluntary members sharing similar educational backgrounds[20]; living similar life styles; reading the same subscriptions and having similar political leanings. The organization makes every effort to increase this integration, through the general meeting, the newspaper and community events (Omoto and Snyder, 1995).

4.6 Community Relations

On joining the Coop, you are aware from the outset that the organization is not "just a food store". The organization presents itself as a community and this message is strengthened by ideologies that focus on a collectivist agenda (Rothschild-Whitt and Whitt, 1986); common ownership; democratic decision making; educational programs and a concern for others (Rosner, 1991)[21]. A community is defined as a social group of interdependent members, who

19 *"Cooperatives invite worker members to invest their identities in their work, to see their work as extensions of themselves through the mechanisms of shared ownership and personal control"* (Restakis, 2010: 238).

20 *"A food club for people who can leverage a good education and the luxury of time"* (New York Times: Praise From Afar for the Park Slope Food Coop, 03/07/2011).

21 *"The expression of good will and the assurance that one is prepared to help others, is the foundation of trust. Consequently, the practice of reciprocity has profound social ramifications"* (Restakis, 2010: 97).

share common characteristics, views, interests and goals (Oxford English Dictionary)[22]. Community discourse is powerful, as it mobilizes a social construct that is extremely relevant in our social lives. In an era when "a sense of community" is often described as diminished in academic and media circles, the Coop is providing a culture that allows members to redefine how they interact with other people. Members are asked to reinterpret views and outlooks in order to become a constructive member and in so doing, feel a sense of belonging and acceptance. The dominant discourse of community has a strong pull and this is evident in terms of loyalty; commitment; identification and the high expectations placed on the organisation as a result (Hoffman, 2006). The Coop's storied success allows members to take collective pride in the organizations accomplishments (Crocker and Luhtanen, 1990) and *"associated with this are the notions of civic pride, civic virtue or a duty to one's community" (Oppenheimer, 1998: 1).* As Alice explains:

> *"The culture is inclusive, everybody is the same, it's a community focused, so it's not just about working at the Coop, but it's about being part of the community as a whole and I would say, in terms of what it's like to work there, it is very structured"* (Annabelle, Volunteer Member, Maintenance).

Cooperation can be understood as a *"social relation, a collective behavior and a networking activity based on trust towards a generalized other"* (Gherardi and Masiero, 1990: 555). This *"presupposes a direct relationship of equality between the individuals involved"* (Restakis, 2010: 97). Members are situated within this discourse (Foucault, 1978) and can be understood as self-determining individuals, [with] a burden of responsibility to the community (Willmott, 1993: 11 re-emphasised)[23]. The dominant discourse of "collectivity" structures perceptions, so that members think in terms of being part of something worthwhile, equality between members and being accountable to others in the community (Rothschild-Whitt and Whitt, 1986):

> *"It is through rhetoric that the identification process takes place; that the "I" becomes "we"* (Cheney, 1991: 20).

22 The *"construction of collective identity (the creation of "we" in the relation between I and the other) and of cognitive integration between individuals who recognise themselves as similar"* (Gherardi and Masiero, 1990: 555).

23 *"In a network of trust relations, strong emotions are expressed, a common cognitive code of meanings is elaborated, and shared norms are generated. These exert a pressure – not necessarily emotional – which bends the behavior of those involved in the trust relation in one particular direction"* (Gherardi and Masiero, 1990: 556-557).

Dominant organizational discourses convey outlooks and views that are integral to policies, procedures and the rules of cooperation[24]. Dominant discourses provide a subtle form of control, disciplining members to think in terms of reciprocity, equality and consideration for others. The continuity and coherence of these organizational narratives are fundamental to how members interact with one another, binding volunteers (Omoto and Snyder, 1995), inducing commitment (Wilderom and Miner, 1991) and promoting social exchange, cooperation and participation in a community (Omoto and Snyder, 2002).

The organization has recognised that shared emotional connection is critical to a sense of community (McMillan and Chavis, 1986) and constantly stresses the value and importance of shared experiences and mutual history. This community discourse *"guides and directs…. thoughts, feelings, and behaviours"* (Omoto and Snyder, 1995: 684), so that feelings of efficacy, responsibility, and support are structured to some extent by the socialising effects of discourse that saturate *"….the working body with feelings, emotions and wishes"* (Rose, 1990: 244). When a member interprets their efforts as benefiting the community, they are identifying with that community, its codes, outlooks and ethics. Dominant discourses stimulate and "act on" the individual, so that recognizing how one should think and act is essential to appreciating what it is to be an active and social member of the organization and its goals[25]. Members are constantly reminded that they are participating in a social project that is founded on trust, reciprocity, solidarity and cooperation (Milligan and Fyfe, 2005) and this has important implications for issues of power, control and social recognition:

> *"….because a cooperative is assumed to be a voluntary, formal organization, its members' involvement has both a calculative and moral basis, and control relies on normative power. Thus trust and solidarity are values of the cooperative culture and also forms of social relation"* (Gherardi and Masiero, 1990: 553).

A sense of community rests on *"the sharing and reinforcement of attitudes and values that are interpersonal and constitute essential bonds between the individual and community"* (Restakis, 2010: 97). Discourses that discuss the importance of reciprocity and solidarity present *"a relational pattern, a form of collective behaviour and networking activity based on*

24 *"Cooperatives are based on values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, cooperative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others"* (Park Slope Food Coop Membership Manual).

25 *"As the individual strives to behave in concert with the changed self-concept"* (Finkelstein and Penner, 2005: 405).

trust" (Gherardi and Masiero, 1990: 554) that enhances the sense of connection amongst members. These discourses stimulate a sense of accord, uniformity and cohesion that can be described as "mechanical solidarity" (Durkheim, 1893), where members *"start to recognise their similarity and, find a common interest in building and defending a collective identity"* (Gherardi and Masiero, 1990: 556). This sense of group cohesion heightens the relationship of individual to community (Kanter, 1972) when an individual wishes to interact with others; belong to the group; maintain relationships; cooperate with others and participate in a democratic organizational structure (Wilderom and Miner, 1991), strengthening social connections and promoting participation in the mobilization of these discreet messages. This positions members within a culture, that exerts a powerful degree of influence and control, providing an *"implicit cooperative accord in order to maintain the social order and generate concrete behaviours" (Gherardi and Masiero, 1990: 555)*[26].

4.7 A Very Democratic Organization

The Coops' founding egalitarian ethos continues to reverberate in conversations, outlooks and animated discussions at general meetings[27]. The organization is constructed by dominant discourses that offer social utility and fulfilment; presenting a *"more involving, discursive and democratic form of organization" (Rothschild and Milofsky, 2006: 137)*. These discourses are supported by the open decision making process that emphasises the importance of member opinion and control, presenting an inclusive environment for volunteering that is fundamental to the development of a healthy community (Milligan and Fyfe, 2005). The Coop presents itself as a democratic organization and this is supported by a "collectivist-democratic" structure, where authority is defined and delegated by the member community (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979). This "democratic consciousness" has achieved a critical mass (Bernstein, 1976) and this is reflected at general meetings (Appendices 11.2), where members congregate each month in order to voice their opinions, present their ideas for future community development and vote on diverse issues, from appointing members to the board, to whether to stock beer on the shelves. This *"degree of democratic involvement and influence has been maintained by developing a more complex democratic structure, combining representative and direct forms*

26 Members cannot simply forgo their privileges without a degree of emotional discomfort, because of the strong attachment many develop with the organization and the products it stocks on its shelves. These motives act on the individual to strengthen organizational control.

27 While there is substantial agreement over organizational goals, much of the dialogue at general meetings is on how these goals can be achieved, mobilizing dominant discourses that compete for space within the organization.

of democracy, that enrich and reinforce one another" (Cornforth, 1995: 520). Voluntary members sit on committees that have substantial power to drive change, oversee the organization and even decide on disciplinary actions where required[28]. However, the most important democratic process is the general meeting:

> *".... [an] open and transparent meeting process, the coops' form of democracy, is central to the sustainability of our precious coop"* (Founder and General Manager; Joe Holtz, 2003: 5).

The Coop promotes a democratic decision-making process that provides all members with a forum to discuss organizational issues. For example, when the organization decided to offer full time staff pensions, it was voted on and agreed by the membership at the monthly community town hall. These general meetings are open to all members, who are encouraged to attend through the work credit program. However, this does not explain the high attendances at these meetings. Many members participate at these "community halls" throughout the year, even though the credit program offers a maximum of two credits a year. This is because participatory democracy often positively effects commitment and satisfaction (Rosner, 1981)[29]. This is particularly relevant when a member has identified with the Coop and its values and feels that the general meeting *"has considerable influence on outcomes that are important to them"* (Rothschild-Whitt and Whitt, 1986: 301). For example, a referendum can be called at any monthly general meeting by a group of members. This process caused a stir, when a group of members tabled a boycott of Israeli products for alleged human rights violations against Palestinians. At an historic general meeting in April 2012, thousands of members attended and voted nearly 2:1 against a referendum, with a shared outlook that the media reaction was damaging the organization. This was illustrated by an open letter published in the Coop newspaper (the Linewaiters Gazette), from the general coordinators, explaining why they would be voting against the proposal and asking others to join them[30]. The letter discussed substantive values such as reciprocity, diversity and solidarity, arguing that the proposal was divisive and eluded that *"the making of a successful democratic pluralistic society depends partly on its citizens acting collectively, in association with each other, or*

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28 We *" learn to participate by participating and ... feelings of political efficacy are more likely to be developed in a participatory environment ... The experience of a participatory authority structure might also be effective in diminishing tendencies toward non-democratic attitudes in the individual"* (Pateman, 1970: 105).

29 *"The experience of democratic participation can alter peoples' values, the quality of their work, and ultimately, their identities"* (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979: 522).

30 *"Even if they are in a minority, their preferences as well as their opinions are respected and encouraged". In short, coop leadership manages meaning as a process of invitation"* (Buzzanell, Ellingson, Silvio, Pasch, Dale, Mauro, Smith, Weir and Martin, 1997: 304).

individually, for the common good" (Oppenheimer, 1998: 1).

4.8 The Volunteer Membership

Voluntary contributions are part of the "fabric of life" in most western cultures (Wilson and Pimm, 1996: 24). National surveys indicate Americans are increasingly more likely to volunteer than in previous decades (Goss, 1999) and around 50% of adults in the United States spend at least some of their time as unpaid volunteers (Independent Sector, 1994). Society views *"participation in volunteer activities as highly desirable and people are encouraged through diverse avenues of socialization to become volunteers"* (Clary and Snyder, 1999: 158). For example, many American schools require students to participate in voluntary service in their community as part of their curriculum and these young people reported improved interpersonal relationships, higher social relatedness and greater sense of community, empathy and altruism as a result of their volunteer efforts (Yates and Youniss, 1997).

A concern for others is essential to cooperation (Amartya, 1966) and this is evident in organizational texts that discuss equality, camaraderie, reciprocity and connectedness (Holtz, 2003). Therefore, volunteerism is defined in this thesis, as long-term, planned and discretionary social behavior that benefits strangers and occurs within an organizational context (Penner, 2002). For Durkheim, voluntary activity is an endeavour that focuses on collective, rather than individual needs (Milligan and Fyfe, 2005). It involves active citizenship (Turner, 2001) in a civil society (Giddens, 1998), *"underpinned by ideas of mutuality, empathy and trust, with a focus on developing a sharing and caring organization"* (Milligan and Fyfe, 2005: 420).

The Coop is a non-profit organization that generates substantial turnover, with profits neutralized by the discounted price policy, which passes financial benefits directly to members through the savings on their purchases and can be understood as *"a midpoint between conventional businesses and nonprofit organizations"* (Hoffmann, 2006: 168). Members *"may be looking to save the earth or to find human connections, but they are first of all looking for good food at good prices"* (Jochnowitz, 2001: 62). Therefore, the Coop is distinct from other forms of voluntary work, because members are extrinsically motivated by the substantial discounts they receive on groceries. However, the Coop is defined as voluntary by its' social perspective (Oppenheimer, 1998) and because it is self-governed, non-profit making and voluntary (Kendall and Knapp, 1995). Volunteer members enact the organization's commitment and desire to help others (Tang, 2006) and this is evident in how material gain is often not discussed in the *"vocabulary of motives*" (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979: 515). When an

individual identifies with organizational values and ethics, they are repositioning themselves as intrinsically motivated members of a community (Cappellari and Turati, 2004)[31]:

> *"Grounded in [members'] values and passions and sustained by the bonds of trust that develop within and between them. The organizational expression of its [members'] ethical stance toward the world: the non-profit organizations, by way of its very existence and practices, conveys a public statement of what its [members] see as a better, more caring, or more just world. This is why it came into being in the first place"* (Rothschild and Milofsky, 2006: 137).

Volunteer labour is central to the Coop's success (Wilson and Pimm, 1996). The Coop model means that volunteer members do not merely supplement the work of full time paid coordinators, they provide the majority of labour, including accounting, legal, training, membership and other tasks, often the sole responsibility of core full time employees. Therefore, the Coop membership does not confirm to more traditional definitions of volunteer labour (Wilson and Musick, 1999). Collective organizations such as the Coop have been perceived as the dark matter (Horton Smith, 1997 in Rothschild and Milofsky, 2006: 141) of society, because unlike traditional non-profit organizations who exist to perform charitable services, to provide healthcare and aid etc., the cooperative is a small non-profit organization, where most of the members are volunteers and its existence is based on collective substantive values, that offer something that cannot be provided by for-profit competitors. Rather than material incentives, the organization relies primarily on purposive incentives such as value fulfilment and solidary incentives, such as friendship and connectedness (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979). They are hybrid organizations:

> *"....like non-profit organizations, they are set up to serve social needs and substantive values. Like businesses, they seek to produce a livelihood for their worker-owner members, but unlike conventional businesses, they are not profit maximizing. They have social purposes and egalitarian values as well"* (Rothschild and Milofsky, 2006: 140).

Much of the literature exploring volunteering examines the motives that drive individuals to commit their time and efforts. Motives such as enhancing self-esteem, fostering social relationships, increasing knowledge and benefiting others (Clary and Snyder, 1999) can be

31 As members continue to volunteer, then their commitment is likely to increase and facilitate further identification with the organization (Penner and Finkelstein, 1998).

understood as an expression of organizational texts and dominant discourses that discipline identity construction. To some extent cooperative members are self-selecting and *"certain distinctions become immediately obvious in terms of the types of volunteers the Coop attracts and the extent to which these volunteers are prepared to conform to policies and rules of the organization, accept their disciplines and believe in its purpose"* (Wilson and Pimm, 1996: 25).

4.9 Full Time Coordinators

The Coop employs five general coordinators, who manage around sixty full time coordinators. These members are responsible for organizing the volunteer membership and managing the store. The staff can be split broadly into two groups. The office coordinators, whose responsibilities include monitoring volunteer work credits, compiling statistics, coordinating volunteers working in the office, organizing and reporting general meetings, producing the Coop newspaper (the Linewaiter Gazette), managing the accounts, providing technical support to the checkouts, coordinating orientation meetings, signing up new members and corresponding with absent members. The second group are receiving coordinators, who are responsible for directing volunteers in processing bulk items, restocking shelves and taking receipt of deliveries. They are also in charge of placing orders, choosing suppliers and deciding which products to stock. All coordinators are paid the same wage, no matter their length of service and can be understood as a "fraternity of peers", all with equal status. There is no hierarchy among their managers, the general coordinators, each has their own assignments, and an equal say in meetings. This flat structure allows the staff to form an egalitarian collective with substantial autonomy in handling responsibilities. Employees are encouraged to *"structure themselves around relationship development, maintenance, nurturing, and caring. Relationships with others are seen as a source of strength and as an end, rather than a means to an end"* (Buzzanell *et al.*, 1997: 289) and there is an informal atmosphere among colleagues who rely on each other for support, facing the challenge of working with an ever changing cast of volunteers (Gherardi and Masiero, 1987).

Full time member coordinators, responsible for directing and planning, are required to do so with an ever changing workforce that expects to be treated on an equal footing. This means that part of their role requirement is *"derived from the values, norms, ethical precepts, and codes of the [membership], rather than from managerial hierarchy"* (Wilderom and Miner, 1991: 370). Cooperatives can be understood as *"organizations without domination, in that, ultimate authority is based in the collectivity as a whole, not in the individual. Individuals, of course, may be delegated carefully circumscribed areas of authority, but authority is delegated*

and defined by the collectivity and subject to recall by the collectivity" (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979: 512). In line with the dominant tenets of democracy, community, equality and cooperation, full time coordinators have developed a "participatory leadership" style (Buzzanell *et al*., 1997) that recognises that the *"employee and the volunteer share a common need for self-esteem, relatedness, autonomy and competence. However, while the employee relies on his job for his livelihood, the volunteer does not. That is where the difference lies"* (Shin and Kleiner, 2003: 66). This acknowledges that the relationship between full time coordinator and volunteer is not manager and subordinate, but steward and peer. What has resulted is a "representational" form of management (Cornforth, 1995), where coordinators translate dominant values into *"leadership images that are broad enough to encompass different behaviours, members, and events, but consistent enough to display a unified representation of the coop"* (Buzzanell *et al*., 1997: 296). These representations provide structure and a sense that staff work in affiliation with volunteers to provide stability, steering members for the benefit of the community (Stryjan, 1994):

> *"The staff and volunteers who start and join these organizations have a distinct vision of a just world, of some aspect of an ethical world, and a desire to play a personal and significant role in bringing that valued vision into being. This means that to be true to their purpose and potential, nonprofit organizations must attend to both: their substance and their form, as their substantial purposes cannot be achieved outside of a consistent managerial form"* (Rothschild and Milofsky, 2006: 142).

Rather than enact authority, as a lever of control and direction, coordinators employ dominant discourses to empower directives, so that what is being asked makes sense from an equitable, reciprocal and community stand point. This means that mood and context play a critical role, in delineating which dominant discourse is applicable in each instance and setting (Wilson and Pimm, 1996: 24):

> *"….characterized by embeddedness of work and life aspects, by spontaneity, by expression of emotion, and by inclusion…. [Coordinators] place themselves at the heart of activity rather than at the top, and they view their strength as derived from connection and information sharing"* (Buzzanell *et al*., 1997: 289).

Coordinators enact leadership by "speaking for the collective" and can be perceived as "custodians" of the cooperative. They represent "common interests" and their role is partly to advise what "ought to" be done in each instance. Directives are *"based on substantive values*

applied consistently, if not universally. This permits at least some calculability on the basis of knowing the substantive ethic that will be invoked in a particular situation" (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979: 513). When a volunteer member challenges a coordinator's authority, it can be understood as resisting cooperative ideology and the dominant discourses that their influence is based on (Labov, 1990)[32]. Many volunteer members are amenable to these dominant discourses and this generates moral engagement that feeds and nurtures normative control and maintains shared understandings, strengthening organizational identity and simultaneously pushing conflicting views to the margins[33].

Coordinators are bounded by discourse that identifies volunteers as equals, so that part of managing others is self-management, where the full time member is required to control transactions, so as not to subordinate others (Hadley and Goldsmith, 1995). Full time staff are self-disciplined by an over-arching framework (Foucault, 1978), where decisions need to be made reflexively, guided by a strong sense of organizational identity and in accord with the dominant principles that underpin the organization. These dominant values form a sound-board against which all ideas are bounced. Maintaining a cycle of vigilance that ensures procedures, rules and management decisions are an expression of cooperative ideals (Cornforth, 1995).

4.10 Concluding Remarks

The previous sections have demonstrated how dominant discourse at the Park Slope Food Coop provides a strong sense of coherence and as a result the organization benefits from a strong identity, that echo's the aspirations and ethics of its member community. These operate for the espoused benefit of the community and offer an interesting contrast to research that has examined the normative power of strong cultures in for-profit companies. The organization exerts a great deal of influence and this enables a relative few full time members to coordinate the vast majority of volunteer members. In the absence of traditional methods of bureaucratic authority, the Coop relies on powerful forms of normative control and this makes the organization particularly interesting when examining how humour and laughter provide important forms of communication that act as conveyors for discourse that help structure outlooks and interpretations.

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32 *"They are rooted in the structure of collectivist decision making. Although participants generally attribute conflict and avoidance to the stubborn, wrongheaded, or otherwise faulty character of others, it may be an inherent cost of participatory democracy"* (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979: 521).

33 *"We welcome all who respect these values"* (As approved by the June 1998 General Meeting, Park Slope Food Coop Membership Manual*).*

While dominant discourses shape understandings and meanings, "cooperatives can incorporate, or be a vehicle for, quite disparate, and sometimes outright opposing ideologies" (Stryjan, 1994: 64) and this provides space for alternative viewpoints. Members contribute to the production of meaning, in ways that shape and modify dominant discourses (Giddens, 1984) and this is evident in how members identify with each other. Humour can become crucial to how members integrate their need for autonomy, with their drive for affiliation and acceptance, providing an environment that fosters both autonomy and relatedness (Lakin and Mahoney, 2006):

> *"….the standards and norms of the community provide a backdrop for [member] efforts and in reciprocal fashion, the community is often directly and indirectly changed by the activities of [members] and the time and energy that they invest in responding to the needs of the community"* (Omoto and Snyder, 2002: 848).

Discursive practices that constitute power shape *"members' outlook, but it is also open to continuous modification through discourse"* (Stryjan, 1994: 65). There are dualities in the discourses on community and autonomy; joint efficacy and governance; equality and difference; interdependence and self-determination; flexibility and adherence; the familiar and dynamic (Buzzanell *et al*., 1997)[34]. These contrasting discourses, while not mutually exclusive, provide resources for humour and agency (Giddens, 1984).

While the symbolic value of community pushes other values aside, members often do not recognise themselves as distinct from wider society and its competing discourses. Members of *"….collectivist organizations constantly shift gears, that they learn to act one way inside their collectives and another way outside. In this sense, the difficulty of creating and sustaining collectivist attributes and behaviour patterns results from a cultural disjuncture. It derives from the fact that alternative work organizations are as yet isolated examples of collectivism in an otherwise capitalist-bureaucratic context"* (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979: 522)[35]. Identities are malleable and incorporate a wide range of influences (Gergen, 1991), so that a change of tone; a funny perspective and feelings of mirth often allow us to move away from normative identities that are established and reinforced through dominant discourse and emphasise who

34 Ideological conflicts *"involve a competition between simultaneously held but conflicting beliefs"* (Labov, 1990: 155).

35 *"The instinct is unrefined and atrophied in a society in which the norm of social relations is competition, dependence or subservience to authority"* (Restakis, 2010: 239).

were are outside the organization's confines.

The Coop is often perceived as "rule bound" organization, where many *"spheres of organizational activity are subject to explicit rule governance"* (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979: 512). For example, the requirement to work, while necessary, can sway an individual's perceptions, so that they resist organizational texts and perceive that they work only because they are required; for the discounted prices; for the high quality products; because their wife/husband insists they remain with the Coop and so on (Stukas, Snyder and Clary, 1999). This reinterpretation surfaces in humour and laughter and can be understood as a form of resistance, where members identify with these alternative dialogues and undermine their engagement with organizational discourses (Kunda and Schwartz, 1983)[36].

While the Coops' rules and structure are the frequent topics of media reports and conversations over coffee and strollers in the neighbourhood, when you become a member, part of comprehending the organization involves recognizing that the Coop has not displaced democracy with bureaucracy; flexibility with rigidity; sociality with conservatism or charisma with practicality. Rather, these social discourses often compete for space within the organization, tumbling out into the streets, surrounding neighbourhoods and beyond. What is more important, engaging reflexively with other members or the strict adherence to rules and structure, which can appear to take precedence over relationships? Members often engage in these discussions at a distance, laughing and joking about things they find amusing. Humour and laughter provides perspectives and can be extremely powerful within social discourse, as they appear to carry weight, allowing members to enact identities in ways that provide important insights into how relations of power shape and are reshaped through the interconnectedness of human behaviour.

36 *"The Coop is worse than socialism", "because at least in a socialist country, if you know the right people, you can get out of it"* (New York Times: At a Food Coop, a Discordant Thought: Nannies Covering Shifts, 02/18/2011).

5. Organizational Discourses and Humour

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a rich and textured account of the organization and address the central research question; how do people use humour and laughter in ways that discipline meaning, strengthen normative texts and engage with dominant discourses. I examine how humour and laughter allow members of the Coop to engage with organizational texts in dynamic ways. Organizational members talk about how humour and laughter shape the ways dominant discourses are both mobilised and comprehended, discussing how humour often plays on competing discourses, opening up a discrete vehicle for understanding oneself in relation to others.

The chapter aims to provide insight into structure and agency at the Coop. Organizational members talk about how humour and laughter facilitates a need for structure and an enduring urge to fluidly relate to each other as individuals. The initial section (5.2) discusses how I arrived at my opening interview question and provides insight into how humour is talked about by organizational members to comprehend the organization. The next sections provide accounts of the organization that demonstrate the various ways in which humour disciplines meanings through the mobilisation of discourses, to act as a sensemaking device between members. Section (5.3) examines how the word "cooperation" is appropriated by members in order to emphasise, maintain and eschew certain discourses. The next section (5.4) reveals how members are disciplined through the discourse of community and how this resides in humour that constructs members as insiders. These opening sections lead to an examination of how humorous discourses permit members to constitute outlooks and understandings that compete for space within the organization. Section (5.5) examines how humour provides adjacencies, juxtapositions and space for structures to develop organically. Humour and laughter often reveal the depth of alignment between discrete views and dominant organizational texts, creating a dynamic interplay between discourses. Section (5.6) examines how members use humour to mediate interpretations of officially sanctioned rules and procedures, so that meanings can often appear in flux. Members talk about insider jokes and humour in ways that support discourses that weaken official texts. Section (5.7) examines how dominant discourses restrict some behaviour, while encouraging others. Humour is constituted through discourses and members talk about how they enact humour that is shaped through relations of power. Section (5.8) reveals how dominant discourses structure and limit the range of humour. When members connect through humour in more structured ways, outlooks often

become ambivalent rather than transforming, so that even humour once inspired by non-conformity acts to delimit agency. The final sections within this chapter focus on the stories members tell to make others laugh and how these influence subsequent views and understandings. Section (5.9) highlights how "funny" anecdotes are part of the fabric of the community and are appropriated by members to constitute mutual understandings and perspectives on organizational realities. Section (5.10) examines how funny stories often strengthen dominant discourses, by revealing behaviours that fall outside of widely held views within the community. This is elaborated further within Section (5.11), which provides accounts of organizational tenets that were breached to such an extent, they have passed into folklore, providing narratives for the comprehension of what it is to be a member in "good standing". These funny stories provided structure to understandings and influenced how members perceived their actions in relation to others.

The findings in this chapter demonstrate how organizational realities are socially constructed by members who engage reflexively with dominant discourses, shaping and shaped by relations of power. Organizational members talk about how humour transmits meanings and is an important medium for comprehending social environments in relation to others. My intention is to situate the narrated constructions of reality through which members account for their actions and beliefs within a discursive framework (Silverman, 2000: 123) to highlight the inherent tension between structure and agency at the Coop and provide a context and foundation that underpins the next two chapters. These following chapters narrow the focus further to examine how members are constituted through discourses mobilised within humour, revealing how humour fosters relations of power and shapes identity construction.

5.2 What Do You Find Funny at the Coop?

This section addresses some of the major themes that emerged during my interviews with other members. Dominant discourses shaped perspectives at the Coop and were reproduced through humour and laughter, shaping what individuals found funny about the organization and other members (Mitchell *et al.*, 1986). Informants maintained that the Coop had a strong organizational identity, governed by the underlying principles of the food cooperative movement (McEvily and Ingram, 2004: 35) and that this was reflected in the outlooks and views of many. However, multiple prevailing discourses competed for space within the organization and humour allowed members to bring discrete perspectives into play, acting as a sounding-board for what members thought the Coop was and should be (Clegg, 1989), so that the initial question I asked during interviews became "what do you find funny at the Coop"?

> **"***The first thing that struck me as being funny at the Coop was all the different procedures and lines that you have to go through. First you wait on line to have your food checked through; then it used to be that you had to wait in a whole other line to pay. Now you still do if you want to pay cash, but you can actually pay with a card. Then you had a whole other line just to get your little receipt checked; that made me laugh. When I first went in there, it felt like "The Little Rascals", I don't know if you know that TV show, where little kids are like "Mr. Spanky, telephone call" and the person is right next to them, "I'll see if he's in", pretending to run a company or a business. That's how it felt and still does to this day. Are you kidding me? I have another line to go through to get out of here, your little fluorescent receipt check?"* (Gaynor, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

This perspective, focusing on organizational foibles echoed that of other informants. Interviewees talked about finding officially sanctioned procedures amusing and possibly superfluous. As Hattie illustrates, these discourses were tied up with a perception that most members had incomplete knowledge of what it was they were supposed to be doing, making misconceptions and misinformation all the funnier:

> *"You know, how you ask around, you ask the workers is there any cilantro [coriander]? So one of the workers paged out and said "do "we" have any cilantro downstairs?" Somebody from upstairs [in the office] picked up the pager and said "no, we have a problem with the shipments from the herb farm. There*

was a problem with the truck route and they think it can be remedied in a few days, so we are expecting the herbs to come in next week", then there is silence. Then somebody else picks up the pager [from the basement storage area] and says, "I'm sending up a case of cilantro" [laughs] (Hattie, Voluntary Member, Office).

Another theme that emerged from my interviews was that those who attributed their membership as more encompassing and vital to society were often a cause for amusement:

"There are things that are unintentionally funny about the Coop. Mostly, the self-seriousness of the Coop and how many people take it as a cause and a mission. How people take things too seriously. Everyone joins the Coop because they take food seriously or because they want to save money seriously" [laughs] (Charles, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

While some members preferred to draw on the power of rules and authority, humour often destabilised and undermined that very need for structure (Rodrigues and Collinson, 1995; Gabriel *et al.*, 2000). When a member drew on their title, length of service or their strict adherence to a rule, adding power to their perspective, others could reinterpret this and strengthen their own perceptions through a joke, a knowing look or a laugh:

"The absolute strictness of some people's nature towards the rules; some people are absolutely inflexible. I have been on shifts with people like that and they make life miserable for everybody else, so you kind of laugh at them" [laughs]…. this is how they escape; this is where they have a useful role, that they deem as authority" (Susie, Volunteer Member, Office).

The following anecdotes illustrate how members shared similar outlooks through the things they found funny. When members joked about people being "too serious", "too earnest" or "too rigid", they were mobilising dominant discourses at the Coop and in the process shaping interactions and influencing perspectives (Richardson, 1990: 25). Identities are shaped by the humour and laughter of others in ways that strengthen and weaken positions (Billig, 2005: 199). This is an ongoing conscious and subconscious process (Freud, 1915), so that what members found funny and why often signalled dominant views and this was reflected in what interviewees talked about:

"If you listen to the intercom announcements, it is a great way to hear how specifically people care about stuff…. You hear somebody on the loudspeaker and they are like "is there "really" no uncultured goat's milk extract for weight loss?". This crazy thing you have never heard of; they want a very specific thing and you can tell there is a hint of outrage that the Coop could operate without having it or that somebody else on the other side of the intercom does not know what it is" (Charles, Voluntary Member, Food Processing).

"Coop members will call and they will be really enraged because "I told the dairy buyer that this kind of cream spoils after four days and I was shopping at the Coop yesterday and we are still carrying that same kind of cream. The dairy manager should have stopped buying that cream and I gave him plenty of other suggestions". I mean, who has the time [laughs], to sit around and think about this stuff, get angry about it, and then call the Coop office, where they know they are not talking to real Coop employees [full time coordinators], they are talking to [volunteer] shift workers. "I do not really care about your cream!" I guess that is not really funny, but I find it peculiar. There are many things I find peculiar and there is definitely a culture of self-righteousness that I find a little humorous" [laughs] (Patsy, Volunteer Member, Office).

Interviewees constructed humour as an influential discourse that established many members felt it was important not to take certain views too seriously, providing an important resource for establishing relationships and understandings (Paolucci and Richardson, 2006: 340). "Who are the people I connect to around here"? "Do I share certain perspectives"? "How deeply entrenched are some of my views"? "Am I prepared to volunteer an opinion if I feel others will find it funny"? "If I find myself laughing at myself, does that weaken or strengthen my position"? Humour and laughter provided a means for members to interact with modes of power dynamically, as exemplified by the following perspectives:

"That stereotypical member is the thing that I find most funny; people who take it very seriously…. To me it is not that serious; it is not my life's project; it is a place to go. I enjoy working in the food processing, but mainly, it is a place to go and get some inexpensive high quality food; I do not feel any personal investment" (Leo, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

***"**I don't think there is anything that isn't funny about the Coop. There is a cult like quality to the Coop. It is funny, we are in a time where we are so hyper aware of*

everything we eat, this whole idea of where it comes from, what books were the cows reading when they offered up their beef as sacrifice to us? Were they reading Dostoevsky or were they reading a self-help book? Just the level of enough concern to have a coop is funny to me" (Sid, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

Humour was mobilised by members to represent and create discourses, some of which became dominant within the organization (Tracy *et al*., 2006: 283). These reflexive frames of reference became central to how members comprehended others and the organization.

5.3 Cooperation – What is in a Word?

Discourses on "cooperation" dominated the Coop and shaped how members thought about themselves in relation to others: *"When I meet people in the neighbourhood, I ask them "are you a co-operator?" People think that is funny"[laughs]* (Laura, Volunteer Member, Childcare). The discourses that govern the act of cooperation are made up of sometimes competing narratives and this opened up a rich vein for humour. Many interviewees preferred a conception of "cooperation" that stressed the importance of relationships and exercising a degree of flexibility, an emphasis revealed by the following perspective:

"The Coop goes out of its way to hold people accountable to an extent, but also to be flexible and human. If you call and you say I am sick or something, they do not really give you a hard time. I am sure that there is a correlation between being able to take ourselves a little bit lighter and having space to roll with it a little bit, and not make the rules come at the expense of relationships with people. I think that is a way to be cooperative" (James, Volunteer Member, Orientations).

This perspective, that to "be a Coop member", you should be flexible and fit in with others, opened up possibilities for how members interpreted "cooperation", as Jackie explains:

"These rules (in a sense) are trying to nudge people towards cooperative behaviour, because some people will not get it at all…. they need something to nudge them into thinking "I am actually in a community"…. "The rules definitely serve a purpose, but then what happens is your personality types just cling to rules and think that is what defines the Coop, because they really need that order…. Cooperative to others is a more malleable term. They think "I come; I work my shift; I am nice to people; I help out when someone asks me to; I am not

rude; I don't cut in line.…" (Jackie, Full Time General Coordinator).

This dominant discourse reflected and reinforced a perspective amongst many interviewees that it was more important to engage with other members cooperatively, than emphasise organizational structure in order to ensure compliance. Use of the word "cooperation" demonstrated how views were structured by dominant discourses that evolved informally in the spaces that authority had not colonised (Clegg *et al.*, 2006: 121):

> *"An interpersonal form of lactose intolerance has developed at the Coop. Some of its paid staff members, called coordinators, think that some volunteers are slacking off…. On very rare occasions, they say, they have also signed in as present an absent but conscientious member, sparing the absent from the official "make-up" penalty of working two shifts for every one missed…. The Coop calls that theft of time; Mr Meltzer says. "We call it cooperation""* (New York Times: At the Food Coop: Accused of a Little Too Much Cooperation, 12/11/2004).

Members' interpretation of "cooperation" shaped their outlooks in relation to others (Eisenhart, 2001: 214):

> *"I might be talking to a person who believes that this Coop "is not very cooperative for me.... I guess it depends on your perspective, on what a cooperative means or what cooperation means" [laughs]* (Rachel, Full Time Coordinator).

> *"Your understanding of how you interact within a Coop shapes how you understand the Coop, but that means that others can claim the word as their own"* (Jackie, Full Time General Coordinator).

This perspective stimulated a conversation that led to Jackie expressing the following position:

> *"There is no single uniform understanding of what this [cooperation] is and we all adhere to it. That also goes for our mission statement and the values of the Coop. People latch on to different parts of our mission statement and totally disregard others"* (Jackie, Full Time General Coordinator).

Dominant discourses constructed "cooperation" as working in harmony, relatedness, solidarity, togetherness, tolerance, acceptance; discretion; etc. (Clegg *et al*., 2006: 295). Humour often constituted these discourses, so that an anecdote about a member not "playing ball" could imply uncooperative behaviour and demonstrated that the rhetoric of humour was often structured by dominant views (Foucault, 1988: 11). As Laura illustrates:

> *"I was working childcare the other night and this one kid was not sharing and he would not help clean up, so one of the childcare workers said "that's not very cooperative," "you're not being a very good co-operator" and we all laughed"* (Laura, Volunteer Member, Childcare).

What members found funny provided a medium for the circulation of meanings and understandings. When members joked about others being too rigid, being flexible became an informal value that others interpreted as being cooperative, creating an implicit "consensus" that being flexible was a core value at the Coop (Foucault, 1988: 18). For many interviewees, this perception also implied that being rigid, rule-bound or too serious was uncooperative in some way, as Charles explains:

> ***"****I think being very "Coopy" and actually being very cooperative, despite the linguistic ties, do not overlap. It is funny; it is a "straw man" that we are all arguing against…. The stereotype is more of a useful organizing principle, for everyone to organize against, than it is an actual fact of life…. Most of the people are fine and it is mostly overblown, but it is overblown in a way that means you can make jokes against "that" and then that can unify everyone"* (Charles, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

Members constructed humour through discourses that constituted "cooperation". This influenced how the meaning of "cooperation" was voiced and maintained (Gabriel *et al*., 2000), allowing members to foster discrete outlooks that they considered integral to the working environment (Kondo, 1990: 302).

5.4 The Community Shares Humour

This section examines the way discourses on "community" shaped how members constructed humour. The importance of community was constructed and maintained through organizational texts, formally communicated through the orientation process and reinforced through a myriad of conversations between members (who were often meeting and talking for the first time due to the size of the membership). As the following statements exemplify, many interviewees came to comprehend their sense of community as integral to how they related to others:

> *"It [being a member] is not just about working at the Coop; it is about being part of the community as a whole"* (Annabelle, Volunteer Member, Maintenance).

> *"It [being a member] is how you choose to spend your time, it is not just a place to shop, it is a choice, a conscious choice that people make to be part of this club or movement"* (Jimmy, Volunteer Member, Receiving).

As Alex illustrates, a member's sense of community was disseminated through dominant discourse that established the Coop as "our" organization, allowing members to comprehend relationships as mutual and reciprocal:

> *"It feels like you are pulling your weight and serving a purpose that is not just self-serving, you are providing something for the community as well"* (Alex, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

Members were often aware of media references to the 1960s[37] and these perceptions represented an interesting analogy. While postmodern societies have embraced more individualistic and materialistic self-concepts (Collinson, 2003), there was something familiar about the dominant values of the Coop. As Michael explains, a collegiate atmosphere dominated and many members enjoyed connecting as collective:

> *"People want to have a sense of individual identity, but you need the sense of being a part of a community, because "no man is an island", so that is an important part of it…. Cultures have gone so strongly towards individualism (to an absurd degree) that we have lost some sense of identity. A core sense of*

37 *"The 60's may be over, but that decade's granola-encrusted residuum of idealism and fractiousness may be found in the Coop's dream of cooperative ownership"* (New York Times: Tie-Dyed Food, 04/12/2002).

> *people's identity comes from functioning as part of a community and from your role in that community; as opposed to "what am I achieving on my own; out of my own talents"? That has been exalted, while our role in the community has been diminished. You are thinking about yourself; about your own needs, desires and fears; not thinking about the greater good"* (Michael, Volunteer Member, Shopping).

This sense of community was strengthened through humour that signalled others shared similar views, giving members pause to and reflect on humour's significance (Hochschild, 1983: 22). As illustrated by this vignette from an academic article researched at the Coop:

> *"I joined the Coop because my partner was an enthusiast, but I was more frustrated by the line-up than thrilled by the food. Then one day I was at the food Coop in line, at what was at that point, the longest line I'd ever been on. It has since been surpassed. We'd all been standing there disgruntledly for a while, when a plaintive voice came over the PA and asked if anyone on line was a checker and if so, would they please go check. About half our numbers disappeared to go be checkers. The rest of us just gathered up their belongings and just inched them closer to the checkout place. It was past closing time, but people stayed so that everyone who had been on line could get checked out. It was a thrilling display of cooperation. When a whole bunch of people went to be checkers, I turned to the woman behind me and said, "It's just like London during the Blitz". I'm eccentric and I will just talk to strangers like that. She was this extremely beautiful, very young Black woman and I thought, "Oh, this person has no cultural reference for this thing I just said". And she answered, "Shall we all join hands and sing The White Cliffs of Dover?" It was very affirming. That's when I became a true member of the Coop"* (Jochnowitz, 2001: 56).

As Sandra explains, organizational insiders shared an implicit knowledge of prevailing outlooks and this was reflected in how members constructed insider jokes and ironic looks of amusement:

> *"We've both seen the same thing and it's a powerful connection. I never thought of it very consciously, it's just that you find it funny…. I have felt that in the office many times with members, "they" are talking and we find something funny, so we look at each other and there is a connection that forms this mini community in the office for a couple of hours…. sometimes you can bring other people in by saying something funny"* (Sandra, Full Time Coordinator).

Here, Sid exemplifies how many interviewees constructed humour and laughter as constituting a sense of community:

> *"There is collectiveness; you are there for a similar purpose; you all want something from it; you are getting what you want from it and you are paying for it together. Any group you put in that little basement room is like a microcosm, where you get certain types; you get these sub divisions of types; people pair-off and then next month, the same people will pair off again, it is a little society. You can see immediately those levels of dealing; there are levels of humour that people will take and initiate themselves, while some just sit over in the corner and you see them smile at the conversation, but they never join in. Most of them are gaining from your discourse, because when we are all talking around the table, usually it is something that we all find funny, like a culturally ironic observation"* (Sid, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

Part of any community are the things that bind it and reflect the values of that particular social environment (Fineman, 2003: 17). As Cathy and Hattie illustrate, members constructed humour as an important indication that they were "insiders" and part of the community:

> *"If you are open to talking to someone, then you need to find a way to make that pleasant for that shift, so it is pretty unlikely that you are not going to be open to laugh and joke. It is the root of being comfortable on your shift…. There is an authenticity about peoples' humour and at the Coop you already feel safe making a joke with someone, even if you do not know them, because they are a fellow Coop member and you can joke with them because you are both on the inside"* (Cathy, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

> *"We are communicating in a pleasurable way, in a way that kind of reinforces that we've made a good choice, in being at the Coop, as opposed to going to some other supermarket, where you cannot really interact with people or at least, where there is not "a license" to interact with people"* (Hattie, Volunteer Member, Office).

Members were disciplined through dominant discourses on the importance of community (Foucault, 1977; Fournier, 1999: 282) and constructed humour as one way to demonstrate that they were an "organizational insider". Interviewees talked about using humour to connect with others and foster a sense of belonging: *"The vast majority of people here, to some degree, have a sense of pride, belonging and ownership in something and I think that belonging is really key"* (Jon, Volunteer Squad Leader, Shopping).

5.5 Humour Shapes Dominant Discourse

The dominant discourses that structured and disciplined meanings at the Coop were governed through officially sanctioned texts (Gordon, 1991: 2). However, many discourses appeared to have been shaped organically through humour and the things members found funny (Clegg *et al*., 2006: 120). Humour allowed members to comprehend "realities" from a different perspective; to come to the same outlook; to comprehend how discrete views related to others: *"Humour is a new way of looking at something, particularly something I feel strongly about; it gives me a space to think about it differently"* (James, Volunteer Member, Orientations). As Billy explains, humour and laughter fostered dominant discourse:

> *"One of the things that is coming out of people joking and laughing.... is that being flexible appears to be a core value at the Coop, but it seems to be an informal value that people share amongst each other"* (Billy, Volunteer Squad Leader, Shopping).

Humour provides the capacity to reflectively engage with dominant discourses, fluidly disengaging and reinterpreting what is important (Berger, 1997: 48). For example, many interviewees found what others voiced over the intercom system funny: *"Their beliefs are supposedly about cohesiveness with a group and connecting with a group, but really it is about what they think the Coop should be"* (Bernard, Full Time Coordinator). The following story exemplifies how dominant discourses had been altered at the Coop, so that former prevailing views were now characterised as funny:

> *"She [a friend] paged out "do we have any more goat milk?" The reply came back over the loud speakers, "the goats are having babies right now," as if it was insensitive [laughs]. You know, "how can you be so concerned with your goat cheese, when everyone knows this is the season when the goats are birthing, you are not their priority right now, they are taking care of their young" [laughs]* (Claire, Volunteer Member, Office).

Humour allowed members to emphasise an officially sanctioned discourse to the point where it began to fall down under its own weight (Westwood, 2004: 779). Rather than simple rebellion, this was people comprehending their environment in relation to others (Gabriel, 2008: 320). For example, the following story illustrates how humour allowed members to instantly comprehend how strongly others were aligned to organizational texts, creating a frame of reference that those listening did not feel as strongly as the member talking over the PA:

> *"The other day, somebody asked on the PA system, "do "you" have any clementine"? Then somebody came back on the PA system and said "do "we" have any clementine" [laughs]. That is because of the structure and the culture of the Coop. We are a "we". There is no hierarchy and we are not supposed to say "you"; we are not supposed to treat anyone like they are a worker and we are the customer, because there is no service dynamic. So, to be publicly scolded for saying "do you have" was hilarious and everyone around me was laughing"* (Laura, Volunteer Member, Childcare).

As Alex exemplifies, members constructed humour as a sensemaking device for connecting with others who shared similar views, so that shared humour became an important way of comprehending the organization:

> *"The members you are able to joke with in the community are the ones who have similar values to you, otherwise, you would find it difficult to joke with them and share that sense of humour"* (Alex, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

Members constructed humour in order to frame how committed other members were to certain views. In their talk about humour, participants often revealed how shared laughter embodied emerging understandings and meanings (Bolton, 2005: 144), providing structure to perspectives, by promoting certain discourses that became dominant (Clegg *et al.*, 2006: 120).

5.6 Why Take the Rules so Seriously?

Members constructed humour as an influential form of discourse that de-emphasised officially sanctioned rules at the Coop: *"Joking about this idea of rule-following at the Coop is a form of peer pressure.... that is the prominent way of talking about the rules at the Coop and by making fun of that, it ensures that you are able to have flexibility when you need it..... a little bit of unconscious peer pressure that kind of changes the climate"* (Emily, Volunteer Member, Food Processing). Members talked about how organizational rules and those people who over emphasised them were a topic for humour: *"The funniest thing for me is how seriously some people take themselves when they enforce the rules"* (Teresa, Volunteer Trainer, Cashiers). Humour created and maintained dominant discourses within the organization that allowed members to engage with official rules and tenets reflexively, as Sarah and Jimmy exemplify:

> *"When you joke around about the people who over enforce the rules, you are emphasising "I am not here because of that person or because of the rigidity of the rules. I am here because I want to be here; I choose to be here and I am going to be here on my own terms""* (Sarah, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

> *"There is definitely a common understanding and acceptance of a level of control and rules, but "don't take it too far".... We have a common set of rules; we are all members and we control the vibe of the place, but you have to stop people getting ahead of themselves, otherwise the rule book would become crazy"* (Jimmy, Volunteer Member, Receiving).

Humour that targeted rules and those who enforced them allowed members to share their own understandings and outlooks in ways that coalesced, so that meanings and situations often appeared in flux (Fineman, 2006: 273). This created *"an amorphous area around the rules, so that the rules become an open negotiation"* (Mandy, Volunteer Member, Office). As the following statements illustrate, humour that centred on rules acted to discipline many social situations:

> *"The joking dilutes it, so that when you have to talk to someone, they just don't get it, because the culture of the Coop has diluted the rule. They are like, "you are making a big deal out of nothing" and it is like "it is not nothing; it is not everything, but it is a little more important than you are giving it credit for""* (Jackie, Full Time General Coordinator).

> *"The more time I spend there, the more flexible I feel it is. There is an ebb and flow; aspects of it are not necessarily changeable, but there is a very small set of rules, mainly to do with not exploiting other people and doing your part.... then there are all of these other really flexible parts that you can opt in or out of very easily"* (Karen, Volunteer Member, Office).

For many members, not taking "the rules" too seriously was an important social norm in itself:

> *"Some members always try to adhere to the rules and make sure that they are strictly applied. Others are trying to work with them and around them"* (Fleur, Volunteer Member, Receiving).

As Michael exemplifies, discourses fostered by humour created a perception amongst members that people who rigidly stuck to the rules and took them too seriously did not have a sense of humour:

> *"A lot of people have no sense of irony, or a very diminished capacity for irony, because it is all about perspective. It is all about pulling back and being able to recognise the social structures, the rules that govern our lives, these mutual agreements on how we are all going to behave. There are people who my father used to call "map heads", because they only see the rules and that is all they see…. instead of pulling back and saying "how important is this?"* (Michael, Volunteer Member, Shopping).

All members were subject to the rhetoric in jokes and laughter and a person who did not appear to reflectively engage with the discourses they contained often began to stand out as overly rigid, serious or inflexible. Ironically, these members were often constructed as outsiders in the eyes of interviewees:

> ***"****At the Coop there are clearly defined ones [rules] and there are some others that happen more informally. If someone has not bought into those attitudes and values even though they are an organizational member, in some ways they are an organization outsider"* (Rachel, Full Time Coordinator).

"There is a sense that if a person doesn't have a sense of humour, that it somehow means they are not smart enough to get "it". There is a sense of things being lost on them and so they are not taken as seriously. Ironically, the ones who don't seem to have a sense of humour or who don't seem to get things, they seem less clued in to what is going on around them" (Claire, Volunteer Member, Office).

Vignette No. 1 - Clocking Off Early

In order to work your shift in Food Processing you first enter through the front desk, scan your card to ensure you are in good standing and then head through the aisles, past the shopping carts that are a good indication of how busy it is in the store, snake past people at the fridge where the eggs are shelved, then through the swing doors to the right. You usually have to wait for a cart of produce to come past from receiving (as shelves are stocked continuously), once the path is clear, you enter the deliveries passage and turn right down a tight staircase into the basement, arriving partially acclimatized to the tight and busy spaces, that will be your home for the next two hours forty five minutes:

> *"It's [the premises] tiny considering the amount of goods and produce that they have available, it's not just about the ground floor itself, in the basement…. space is very tight; you are working with people that maybe you don't know, or have only seen a few times…. bagging food; you are physically very close to people* (Annabelle, Volunteer Member, Maintenance).

Your first task on arriving is to sign in for your shift. The book is placed on the shelving used to store the bulk dried fruit and nuts. The shelving creates a tight corridor that leads from the stairs to the processing tables and this means the tables are only partially visible from the signing in book. You are often greeted by the loud chatter of voices, interspersed with laughter, from members finishing the previous shift. Those members who do not belong to the upcoming shift ask the squad leader whether they can join to gain a "work-credit" [or "make-up", as it is commonly referred to] (Appendices 11.1), all members are required to work one shift per month and many cannot attend their own squad for various reasons). Once you have signed in, you head to the boxes under one of the tables to retrieve a bandana (as hair must be covered) and an apron. These items of clothing signal to other members that you are working in food processing and it is not unusual to be stopped on the shopping floor and asked if you can process an item out of stock or to reduce the size of an already bagged item for that member. Some members eschew the Coop bandana for their own hat. I rarely saw anyone wear their own apron, which was an opportunity missed to my perspective. I interpreted this stylistic hat choice to signal that some members felt wearing "the bandana" did not accurately reflect their self-concept.

I would usually take my place around the central tables, as this afforded more opportunities to converse with others. However, on this particular occasion, the squad leader asked if I would bag olives and because they are packed in brine or oil, the task is undertaken on the back table facing the wall, where the sink is situated. Twenty minutes into bagging my fair share of drupes, I was joined by an atypical member, who had made the decision to wear a Nepalese Dhaki Topa hat, rather than don an organizationally recognizable bandana. He was in his fifties, tall, unshaven and distinctly not of Khas or Mongoloid ethnicity. He wore the type of clothing that some call comfortable, others baggy and me "hippy attire", with a pair of walking boots, possibly a holdover from hiking the Himalayas:

> *"In my shift there's somebody that always shows up late, about a half hour to an hour late and she slips in casually, like, hola-lo-la-lo and then when it is time for us all to leave, she leaves with everybody else…. there is a part of me, because I've given up my time, that looks at her and is like, "wait a minute, this is a collective, one for all and all for one, we all have to sign on the dotted line, we all have to agree, otherwise it doesn't work"* (Sid, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

This late arrival revealed himself as "the squad member who bags the olives". These types populate every squad and have a predilection to bag or wrap one particular type of produce. Some olives, others cheese, me dried nuts (because nuts do not stick to your thin latex gloves, tearing them and coating your hands in the process. Take my word for it, figs, raisins and the dreaded currant should be avoided). At this stage in the proceedings, all other tables were taken, so I gave over the olives and worked alongside this new arrival, spilling Brazils, Hazels, Macadamias and the like into separate bags. The produce is then placed on the price/ticketing weigh machine with the appropriate code, a twist tie applied and then collected together and walked up through the labyrinth of passageways, stairs and ballet of shifting bodies, to replenish briskly depleting stocks on a usually packed shopping floor. This means that at any one time, members of the squad are elsewhere and this makes it somewhat difficult to track everyone's location.

This late arriving olive bagger was extremely charming and we proceeded to converse, joke, laugh and discuss our various endeavours. He was an osteopath who worked in the West Village and was currently writing a novel, influenced in part by his travels abroad. We related our travelling and writing experiences and found amusement in each other's foibles. Just as I was about to ask him if he would interview for my research, he took off his apron, cheerfully said "goodbye, it was nice to meet you", turned and left:

> *"It is not directly humour, but it is funny…. the volunteer aspect and the collective cooperation aspect of it, makes you look around, it makes you feel differently"* (Sid, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

Just as he turned to go, I found myself reaching out and my mouth began to shape the word "wait". As in "wait a second, you arrived late and you are now leaving (a full forty minutes) early? We call that "time theft" around here", but in an instant I was restrained by another impulse, one representing an aspect of my identity, forged through my engagement with other members, through humour and laughter, through anecdotes and conversations, I did not want to be labelled "rule enforcer" or place this rule above an immediate relationship, so I said "see you next time and smiled goodbye". He rewarded me with a nod, chuckle and smile that said "I knew you would be okay". I looked around for the squad leader to see if he had noticed, but he was not on the floor, his location unknown. Come to think of it, he was not wearing one of the bright bandanas that would identify him as a member working a shift in Food Processing either….

Humour that commented on members who rigidly stuck to rules demonstrates that context is often important in determining which behaviours fit a particular situation (Holmes and Marra, 2002; Billig, 2005; Martin, 2007). Members talked about how rules were misinterpreted or over emphasised and how this was a source of amusement, as Charles illustrates:

"Right after my wife gave birth, we were at home, we were up all night and her mother came into town. We asked if she could shop for us. She can, but it was like going to the Department of Motor Vehicles. She had my wife's ID, her own ID, some other ID, like all these different things and the person in the Coop was like "I'm sorry, but you also have to have this other thing". It's like "clearly you and I are both human beings and you understand the situation and yet you are going to focus more on the rules". I think my wife's mum made a joke to the person like "do you want my fingerprints and a blood sample?" The other person did not get the joke and answered "they do have that technology and we could implement that here" [laughs] (Charles, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

As Paul illustrates, deliberately breaking a rule or tenet was often a source of humour and signified that those who found it amusing were not one of those who "took things too seriously":

"*I try to sneak people in, because I don't want to wait for those stupid passes and then you have to show a driver's licence. I did that the first time and I said never again. So I try to sneak in with my friends [laughs]. I have done that a few times and more than once I have got caught. Just last week, I had a friend visiting and I wanted to show her the Coop. I said "just walk past, they won't know", but the person at the line caught her and asked "what is your number?" I said "just go"; I mean do we have to do this? We ended up walking right in anyway and I was afraid that she was going to chase me and I think she almost did, but there was a long line and so we got away with it. That person, she had no sense of humour about it" [laughs]* (Paul, Volunteer Member, Office).

Once members connected with others through the mediums of humour and laughter, they were able to establish certain views and understandings in relation to others, creating frames of reference that structured perceptions and formed regimes of truth (Foucault, 1990). This was evident in the way interviewees often constructed themselves as flexible, intuitive and humorous, as opposed to rigid, rule-bound and serious: *"....it [humour] tells you a lot about the person, what they joke about, how far they can go with the joke. It [humour] tells you a lot about their personality; tells you if somebody is more flexible or more rigid.... people with humour might be more open; more flexible…. it feels that way* (Sandra, Full Time Coordinator).

5.7 Humour Bound by Dominant Discourses

The Coops' official organizational identity was fostered through a commitment to certain values including respect, equity and equality. These tenets governed all members through discourses that restricted some behaviours, while encouraging others (Casey, 1999: 174). Relations of power shaped what members found funny and restricted what "insiders" joked and laughed about (Fairclough, 1995: 2): *"At the start, anything I ever said to anybody was a Coop related joke, or story, because I found it intensely weird and funny. Like anything, you become more in tuned to it, more accepting of things, the longer you are exposed to them and now I do not find it as funny…. it is eating me from the inside" [laughs]* (Jimmy, Volunteer Member, Receiving). As Fleur explains, relations of power structured how members mobilised humour:

> *"It is like anything that is held in such high regard, like religion. It limits how you can interact with the "idea" or refer to it with other people. I guess it is partly because I think laughing about something just brings it into the human scale. I think that cultural rules and the way society is structured, often dictates how much people can use their senses of humour*" (Fleur, Volunteer Member, Receiving).

Members talked about how they were careful to keep humour within certain boundaries and that they avoided joking at other's expense. Discourses on equality and respect formed regimes of truth that were embodied in the actions and understandings of members (Foucault, 1990):

> *"You would think an egalitarian spirit would actually foster humour, because it would be okay to joke at everybody…. I notice the extreme extent to which I do that. How I limit myself there, when I would not elsewhere.... I need to test it out, test the limits a little bit more"* (Matt, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

> *"That "egalitarianism" can be so humourless is kind of comical"* (Chris, Voluntary Member, Shopping).

Vignette No. 2 - Members Refrain from "Taking the Piss"

It was 8am on a Tuesday morning and I was at the Coop, working with one of my favourite Food Processing squads. The core of members who made up this squad had been working together for some time. The squad leader was well liked, amiable and funny and had helped to create a collegiate atmosphere. I was impressed that even at an early hour, the group would start to joke with one another as soon as they arrived and I enjoyed chatting and sharing perspectives with members who spent most of the shift laughing together at incidents, comments and stories about the Coop. I was cheese cutting (a task that some members consider more enjoyable than others), when a member from another Food Processing shift arrived to make-up a missed work-slot. He usually processed cheese and was extremely keen to carry out his usual task, so unfazed; I handed over the space and crossed to the opposite table to bag dried fruit. The new guy was short and in his 60s, quite rotund, rosy cheeked and wore round wire spectacles. You have to cover your hair to work in Food Processing and so the Coop provides bandanas and hair nets, which are stored in boxes under the table that I had moved to. He opted for a blue bandana, but rather than tie it around the top of his head, as is the style, he proceeded to tie it under his chin, so that he looked like "Old Mother Hubbard". I could barely contain myself whenever I looked at him and surveyed the room to find someone else who found it funny. However, everyone went about their work, no one laughed, made ironic eye contact or joked about it and that left me wondering if a joke would fall flat. Once he left the room, I was at bursting point and joked about it, but no one wanted to join in and so I left it. It should have been something we could have joked and laughed about without being cruel or offensive. However, in a joint venture, where we were expected to act with respect, tolerance, fairness and equality, the views of the members around you can suppress your natural instinct for jocularity:

> *"In another situation we would have gone on endlessly about it, it was hilarious; we made a comment, and then left him alone. So he wants to wear his head scarf like that, okay…. I have been in situations where we were like little kids picking on each other; making jokes about each other, that was the main kind of humour, but you just would not do that at the Coop"* (Twila, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

The organization was governed through dominant discourses centring on cooperation, equality and reciprocation (Gherardi and Masiero, 1990: 555). This shaped how members voiced humour and participants discussed avoiding forms of humour that were central to their identity: *"I have to turn down my personality a lot on my shift"* (Matt, Volunteer Member, Food Processing). As Jackie exemplifies, interviewees spoke about how banter and other more direct and aggressive forms of humour might be perceived by other members as undermining dominant values:

> *"If humour is discordant with social values, then however funny you might be in real life, members cannot find a way to incorporate it, because the social value is saying something totally different. They are stuck between that social value and humour. They might want to laugh, but they are also constrained by what*

they think the social value is in the Coop" (Jackie, Full Time General Coordinator).

Dominant discourses created a sphere of influence that affected the way members communicated views and understandings (Foucault, 1977: 202–203), so that while humour can be mobilised to exclude or include others, many members constructed humour as an inclusive force within relationships:

"This is a really diverse crowd and humour is a really equalising and can join people in some way, if you can find a shared subject like the Coop itself. We are all participating in that environment, in those rules and in that structure and can find the humour in it. We are all "in the same room" (so to speak) and have a subject and that is unifying in some way" (Gaynor, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

In an organization where equality was valued as a founding ethos, it took some strength; some form of encouragement; or some disregard to joke and laugh in ways that brought that equality into question. While many members discussed how they found it natural to joke directly at the expense of others outside the confines of the organization, most avoided doing so at the Coop. Relations of power impacted humour and it was not unusual for an interviewee to acknowledge that dominant perspectives influenced their sense of humour in that environment. As the following statements illustrate:

"*I had never thought about it, but it is antithetical, because you should not have to walk around on egg shells; you should be able to be yourself"* (Patsy, Volunteer Member, Office).

"I will not make fun of someone below me in the hierarchy at work, but someone at my own level and especially those people above me are fair game. At the Coop, where everyone is at the same level, it should be fine to make fun of people, but it just does not work that way" (Matt, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

As Rachel explains, full time coordinators who knew each other closely, were careful to monitor their humour and remarks when they were in public spaces, aware that their humour might be construed as inappropriate (Foucault, 1977: 217):

> *"That is the risky thing in some ways. I love sarcasm and dry humour and when we are in that little annexe with the door closed, my co-worker Barbara and I, will go for the jugular with each other. I love that I can do that with her, but you have to be really careful, as sometimes we will be on a roll and then it is time to go into the membership office. It is like you have to check yourself, before you go in there, because even if you have been having fun, where we joke around a lot and get each other's humour, not everybody understands what is happening"* (Rachel, Full Time Coordinator).

Members talked about withholding humour and laughter, aware that what just happened could make someone laugh at another time and place. While internalising humour can offer a private way out (Hochschild, 1983: 23), both Claire and Ellie spoke about feeling restricted, unable to share something of themselves with others:

> ***"****One of the problems with the office shift is that most of my humour is just in my head; stories to be told afterwards. A lot of times, when I am there, I feel a little oppressed…. Sometimes there is somebody on the shift who I think might be amenable, but many times, I feel that if I actually say something out loud, no one will think that's funny"* (Claire, Volunteer Member, Office).

> *"I am more likely to laugh at somebody in an outward way or have a chuckle, if there are people around me who are willing to do the same thing, but if somebody next to me is a stick in the mud, I am going to keep it to myself and move on"* (Ellie, Volunteer Member, Office).

How members enacted humour was bound to some extent by the dominant discourse that governed the organization and this led to informants self-monitoring their humour in ways that maintained dominant positions (Burchell, 1993: 268).

5.8 Dominant Discourses Grip Humour

This section examines how humour often acted to tighten discursive relations of knowledge/power making "the rules" and dominant views feel more relevant (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995: 226). Members talked about how humour often centred on rules, rigidity and seriousness, but many also made it clear that they understood this as a way of connecting to likeminded others, rather than a form of criticism of the organization and membership. As Bella illustrates, the tone was often one of "cherished ambivalence", in the same way she would joke about a close friend or relative:

> *"Laughter goes back to family in some kind of connection to how you communicate. Tying that in to the Coop; it is like we are all bonded and if we can come together as family, then making fun of something bonds us. It is like parents; the Coop is the parent and all the kids are making fun of the parent, but really, they don't want to be without their parents"* (Bella, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

In their talk about humour, informants often indicated that their sense of humour distinguished them from some members, while simultaneously building and maintaining constructive outlooks towards the organization and community:

> *"Most of us poke fun at the bureaucracy; that things are so plodding; that there are so many rules, but it is beloved and I will defend the Coop to someone who is outside and not a member. It is a way to connect with other people we meet.... but I feel that it is an act in some way, because my outlook in the world is actually to be very protective of the Coop and even the bureaucracy and seriousness, I actually like those things, but when connecting with other members, we always laugh at those things"* (Cathy, Voluntary Member, Food Processing).

As Fleur explains, this tension between conformity and autonomy; structure and agency; social and individual provided "grist for the mill" (Glaser, 1992):

> ***"****There is this funny mixture of generosity and goodwill, but people are also very vigilant about rules and disciplined about it. The fusion of those two forces creates a funny atmosphere with a lot of potential for humour"* (Fleur, Volunteer Member, Receiving).

There is a sense of safety in joking and laughing in established ways that emphasise dominant discourses (Hobbes, 1651a; Fairclough, 1992: 211). As the following comments illustrate, this brought rules into focus and made them feel more relevant:

> **"***It [joking] says okay, there is a little breathing room here, but at the same time it reminds me that there are actually rules in place and it is a playful way to do that"* (James, Volunteer Member, Orientations).

> *"It is only when you are familiar with something that you can joke about it. The fact that so many of the rules are made fun of means that they are well understood and they go beyond a certain boundary, so that people can make fun of them; it is an acknowledgement that they are very well established in some way"* (Fleur, Volunteer Member, Receiving).

This created an atmosphere where very little became destabilised. Members talk reflected dominant discourses, while indicating a desire to maintain a sense of individuality (Contu, 2008: 367). Informants themselves appreciated that humour was caught up in this internal dialogue:

> **"***You can diminish it by making fun of it, but sometimes it reinforces that you are actually beholden to it and it is more of a joke on me for buying into this thing"* (James, Volunteer Member, Orientations).

As members revealed, rather than engaging reflexively with dominant discourse in ways that effected change in meaningful ways, it became easy to stick to structured forms of humour that handcuffed themselves in the process (Westwood, 2004: 777):

> **"***You are a part of this thing and you are making fun of it, but making fun of it actually makes you more part of it, it incorporates you into it"* (Sally, Volunteer Member, Shopping).

> *"It is comical, but you still accept it in some way, as being who you are or what you are"* (Gaynor, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

As participants pointed out, when members joked in more structured ways it became limiting, because it created a shared language that bound humour and maintained dominant discourses:

> *"We are perpetuating the mythology about it and so it is like a snake eating its own tail"* (Emily, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

> *"If we are laughing at Coop members, then we are really laughing at ourselves, especially if we have been there for years and we really like it and like the process orientated nature. There is no mythical person who is hosting these rules on me; it is more like the rules are part of me"* (Cathy, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

Humour and laughter could often be construed as an acceptance of the situation (Westwood, 2004: 785), one complete with a myriad of contradictions and paradoxes between discourses on autonomy and bureaucracy, equality and authority, flexibility and rigidity, etc. (Bolton, 2005: 144). Members joked when someone took something too seriously, but at other times understood that they became that person who was too earnest about something they thought was important. As Sally explains, humour came to represent the contradictions and infallibility of her own logic:

> *"Being really invested in the Coop, but also making fun of people who are really invested in it? Why would we do that? It does make me wonder if it has always been that way. It feels like I walked into a culture of that [laughs]…. You are trying to reconcile two points of view that you have and it is not always straight forward. We can think two things; two competing ideas about something and humour might be the way that we try to negotiate that"* (Sally, Volunteer Member, Shopping).

Members often presented themselves as mutable; constructed through internal dialogues that entwined conformity and individualism (Zizek, 1999). For example, many interviewees spoke about themselves as an outsider, while simultaneously drawn to the community. As the following statements illustrate, some members discussed how their humour came to represent conformity through a sense of rebellion (Contu, 2008: 372):

> *"When you are a kid, you look at adults and see how many rules they have; you just roll your eyes and say "I will never be that person" and yet we all turn into*

that. The adolescent inside us never died and comes out when we laugh and when we find humour in things, but we are laughing at ourselves, turning into the people we said we would never become" (Susie, Volunteer Member, Office).

"What I do laugh at, is the idea that the Coop is a place that has authority over people's lives. It is the idea of the Coop, as authority figure in many people's minds; that they have to rebel against or conform to. I am more in the "I rebel against my image of the Coop", rather than be oppressed by it, "I am striking a blow for something" [laughs], which is of course is nonsense" (Rob Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

To conclude, members often connected through humour in more structured ways and this allowed shared outlooks to become ambivalent rather than transforming (Casey, 1999: 170). Rather than creating agency, humour that targeted rules, customs and stereotypes often came to represent an acceptance of the dominant position (Knights and McCabe, 2003; Westwood, 2004; Contu, 2008).

5.9 Funny Stories

One of the first things I noticed on becoming a member of the Coop was that people enjoyed talking about the organization. There were a wealth of funny stories in the New York Times and other media outlets about the Coop, but these often appeared polarizing to members: *"There is a certain way, where people who are not "in" the Coop want to make comments or jokes about things at the Coop.... if you are part of it, then you can joke about it, but if you are sitting on the outside rolling your eyes, I don't want to hear about it"* (Claire, Volunteer Member, Office). I wished to elicit an insider's "take" on the experience of being a member (Hollis, 1994: 146) and found that many interviewees illustrated their perspectives with a personal anecdote or "funny" story. These stories presented the organization as far more diverse and multifaceted than outside stereotypes: *"We realize the absurdity of what is reported and we just make fun of it. We can see that they misunderstand the Coop and who makes up the organization.... they are pretty much off base and so inside, people start using it"* (Jackie, Full Time General Coordinator). For example, the following stories presented the organization as far more diverse, relaxed and flexible than it was often portrayed externally, matching my own experiences (Silverman, 2000: 123):

"I find myself being incredibly talkative and it is this venue that is completely separate from any other venue in my life, where you are around strangers, but

you feel like you have some commonality.... that leads to a lot of hilarity. For example, I was working with a woman who is originally from Samoa, and she was bagging trail mix and was like "what is gotakeahike?" I look at it and it was "go take a hike" [laughs], but she was reading it as if it were a Samoan word. We laughed about that for quite a while and I laugh every time I see "Go Take A Hike" trail mix" (Emma, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

"I was down there one time on the shopping floor and somebody paged out asking if there were any chocolate-covered ants, "do we stock that"? There is a 10-15 second lull, chuckles all around me from people that heard the page. Then somebody goes, "we have regular cockroaches in here, but we don't have the chocolate-covered variety" [laughs] (Fred, Volunteer Member, Office).

Interviewees talked about how the stories they told influenced how they felt about the organization and community:

"I think that the way I talk about the Coop makes me feel more like a member. If I never talked with anyone about it; if I just went shopping there and it did not have any mythology about it, then it would just feel like any other place I go to get food" (Emily, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

As Matt explains, funny stories were part of the fabric of the community and a natural way to entertain others:

"You refer back to incidents and relationships and things you are all familiar with; you are thinking outside of the box, but doing it in a way that makes sense, given your shared experience" (Matt, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

A funny story captures another's imagination in a way that allows them to visualise how they would react in that same situation and that can be extremely influential, because they are not only picturing what happened, they feel affected, so that the story lingers in the mind, providing insight, reflection and shape to perspectives (Fineman, 2003: 17)[38]:

38 Interviewees were often reminded of an incident through the interview exchange, recounting something that had amused them at the time or in subsequent retelling. These funny stories helped to shape my own perceptions (Van Maanen, 1988) and were integral to how I came to comprehend the organization.

"It is really funny when someone really hits on something and most people are like "we saw you do that; our group really does do that or the Coop scene really is like that". If you can find those things, it is really satisfying" (Gaynor, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

Vignette No. 3 - The Wedding Story

Shortly after joining the Coop I began my period of participant observation, openly discussing my research interests in order to connect with members and find participants for my interviews. One evening, I was walking an older member home with her cart. She had just finished her shift in the office and had done some shopping before leaving. She laughed when I mentioned my research into humour and laughter and said she had a funny story for me. Her son had just got married and she had returned from the wedding feeling extremely happy for him. Shortly after, she was working in the Coop office on her usual shift and turned to talk to the member next to her about the wedding; how beautiful the bride looked; how she had never seen her boy looking happier; how she felt so pleased for them both, "rather than congratulate me she checked her computer to make sure his new wife had registered with the Coop" [to work a shift under the household rule]:

> ***"****One of the problems with the Coop is that there are so many people that are humourless. They take it all so in earnestly.... they take themselves and situations so seriously, but then there are things that I take very seriously there too, like the people who are trying to pretend they don't have anybody else living in their household and only work one shift"* (Claire, Volunteer Member, Office).

I found the "wedding story" extremely funny and it came to shape my own perspectives, leading to a rich seam of material reflected in my findings. The story shaped my subsequent conversations and interviews and was a point of reference in early exchanges, helping me to intuitively comprehend patterns of thinking within the organization. I often retold the story to other members and it nearly always drew a smile or a laugh, with many people adding their own take or experience, some of which became categories, constituted through further interview stories and perspectives. These included, "taking things too seriously"; "member ideals"; "stories as cultural artefacts"; "rules do not create the vibe"; "cooperation, what is in a word" and "self-observation", which were refined and amalgamated throughout the life of the project. For example, a common line of questioning became, does cooperation involve placing rules above relationships?

> *"I notice that people take their shift and their jobs too seriously. There is a fine line. You are expected to work and if you're not doing anything, if you are slacking off, then someone is going to say something, but then if you are going to take it too seriously, it is like "come on, really".... when you are sharing a story and a couple of people are laughing at it. If you are new, you are kind of picking up on that. You are thinking "so that is how things go around here"* (Mark, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

Within interview exchanges, members often offered a story from outside the organization to qualify and illustrate their perspectives, reflecting how stories allowed members to connect in ways that were not restricted to the confines of the organization, providing perspectives that transcended that particular social reality (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002: 622):

> *"One of the first projects I worked on after college was doing some video editing work. I was an assistant video editor on a documentary series that was being produced by the Smithsonian, a social anthology study of firemen…. It was filming them on their breaks, between fighting fires and it was really about storytelling. When they sit around and tell stories, how they were passing along knowledge from experienced fire-fighters to the newer ones; not just about how to interact socially; they would also tell stories about the fires they had been in and difficult situations…. Those guys were very funny and they would speak in a very jarring way, because they would talk about horrible things they had seen and they would be laughing about it. So there was a lot of "whoever is funny, is a better story teller to a certain extent, if you are more entertaining, then you will be listened to longer" and so that has stuck with me for a long time"* (Rob Voluntary Squad Leader, Food Processing).

When a member told a "funny" story they were inviting someone else into their world and allowing them to glimpse their perspectives and what they found important (Sims, Huxham and Beech, 2009: 376). Funny anecdotes were not just entertaining, they provided an influential way for members to connect and relate (Holmes, 2000: 163). As Charles reveals, once others laughed at a story, they had revealed part of themselves in relation to others, so that laughter became an influential force that shaped perceptions:

> *"There are so many clues in a story. When you tell somebody a story, you say I did this; I went to this place; you provide cultural references and any of those things provides a clue of whether this person is like me; that I could make jokes with them; are they going to have a similar mind-set; have they ever seen The Daily Show; are they going to have a sense of whether or not people are cool…. You can do that by telling a joke, but that's a risky way, it is like you are jumping right in the water and people are either going to like it or be offended, but if you share some stories, you are getting to know somebody"* (Charles, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

When the story involved an experience within the organization, it often became a social comment that members could pass on themselves, sometimes subtly changing the story to match their own experiences (Boje, 1995: 998):

> *"You can "take it home" by internalising what they said, then tell that story to a different group of people and say, "this guy I know"; "this has happened", so that it becomes a viral thing and that humour; that perspective makes people think"* (Fred, Volunteer Member, Office).

> *"Even if it's a complete outlier, or it doesn't happen very often, you can build your experiences that way too. If you have not been there yourself, then you say next time somebody starts up a discussion, "this guy I know; or this happened" and you are into that social more, talking and relating to people on a level that normally you would not be able to relate to and I think it is valuable in that way"* (Fred, Volunteer Member, Office).

As Emily elaborates, stories are appropriated by listeners, who relate it to their own experiences, so that the meaning, perspective and structure become entwined with their own views and predispositions. How that person relays a story is influenced by their own sense of humour; by what they related to; what they found funny etc., so that all subsequent retellings, are to some degree, a reflection of their identity in relation to others (Brown, 2004: 97):

> *"Each time you personalise a story, you are making it a part of your own narrative, so that it becomes "your own" telling. It becomes individualised. You get attached to it and tend to reuse it, so that it becomes embed…. I don't even know if I feel that way about it, it is just the story I use; the line that I use, but it starts to become a habit and it feels like that becomes the reality"* (Emily, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

Funny stories provided an influential way of seeing the organization, shaping how members perceived that social space and the people that made up the environment (Thachankary, 1992; Boje, 1995; Weick, 1995).

5.10 Funny Anecdotes Perpetuate and Reinforce Dominant Discourse

Members were bound by dominant discourses and talked about laughing about the things that fell "outside" or "through" prevalent accords (Bergson, 1911: 138). As one told me, *"it [the Coop] is like the TV show The Office, there are certain things that are funny, but at the Coop, what's so amazing is there are 15,000 people and on any given shift it is the same jokes; the same characters; the same patterns of behaviour and it all repeats itself"* (Claire, Volunteer Member, Office). Humour often constituted dominant discourses, while providing texture and meanings that tied members together, making the fabric that bound them stronger (Fineman, 2003: 16). As Twila illustrates, shared humour fostered a sense of connection that drew members' attention to dominant perspectives:

> *"If someone makes a comment, makes a joke about something, then you see how people respond and when people respond the same way, then you know that you think alike about something"* (Twila, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

In the following story, humour and laughter allowed members to interpret their actions in relation to others, so that people came to comprehend a situation or experience from the same perspective, rather than from multiple ones (Sluss and Ashforth, 2007: 15):

> *"He [a Full Time Coordinator] came downstairs, and was giving us a hard time about not wearing hair nets over our beards. He said, "We are going to get in trouble" [laughs] and me and the two other guys, one of which was the squad leader, who had beards, were like "cool, but you have to do it too". He said "I do not work down here", and we were like "well you are down here, so you have to wear one". So we all put hair nets on, hung them over our ears, and were taking photos. In the end, he was laughing too.... I guess it makes sense, hair in the food, but I don't lose that much beard hair" [laughs]* (Mark, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

> *"It [shared humour] bridges that gap a little bit; we get to be people; we all get to be people together and we get to do this together. It takes down that wall of coordinator versus member, because we are members too"* (Bernard, Full Time Coordinator).

The PA became a constant source of amusement for many members, because some of the announcements, requests and conversations that took place (broadcast across the building on speakers) represented things that members joked about amongst themselves:

> *"In August 2011, a Hurricane was supposed to hit and people were going crazy. The Coop was packed; it was the kind of day when you walk in through the front door and you already in line to check out [laughs]. As you snake your way through the Coop, you just have to grab your food. I was downstairs working in food processing; anyone could come down and work a make-up. People were saying "yes please!" We were just throwing stuff out, and then all of a sudden, over the intercom, you hear someone come on "ladies and gentlemen of the Coop, I just want to let you know, the Hurricane is still way out sea, you have plenty of time, just calm down and it will be okay, we will all get out of here alive, thanks" [laughs] and people just lost it; they were just cracking up all over, which was great. People were really nervous and not following that code of conduct, "it's cool, it's out at sea" and made a joke about it, and you could sense that everybody took a deep breath, and were like, yes, what is going on here is pretty ridiculous"* (Mark, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

In many ways, members simply needed to be helpful and respectful while maintaining their work commitment, to be considered a valuable member of the community: *"I do believe that there is a reason why the rules are there and if we stick with them, maybe we will not need them very much. If you are able to be reasonable about how you follow the rules, then there is room for exceptions. It is when people expect exceptions that things start to fall apart, because that is the point; that's the poking hole; that's the Swiss cheese in the situation"* (Bernard, Full Time Coordinator). There was no overt pressure from those in authority, asking members to embrace organizational values or face sanctions. Rather, it was the steady flow of organizational texts and discourse that governed understandings and meanings (Fairclough, 1992: 211) and this was evident in the things members found funny:

> *"Last night, as I was leaving, I dropped a jar of garlic on the floor. I said "it's a good thing that didn't break, because it would have made quite a mess", [puts on intercom accent] "paging maintenance, I just dropped a bottle in the annex, can you come and clean it up please?" That is how people are and it is like, "why can't you clean it up?" Whenever we hear those pages, we make cracks, because they are not at Macys"* (Milla, Full Time Coordinator).

As the following story illustrates, informal rules governing respect, friendliness and empathy led to some interesting dynamics, when a member called the office and lost her cool, unhappy that formal rules did not appear to accommodate her:

> *"I don't know if you will find this funny, but I was doing a shift in the office one day and a woman called and was asking to be forgiven for all of her make-ups. I explained the rules to her and I explained that if she wanted to apply for amnesty, that she could do so. She said that "she did not want to waste it" [laughs]. So I started asking more questions, "maybe her shift was not working for her; maybe she needs to switch shifts; etc." She started to give me this story (that I didn't understand) about how difficult it is for her to get child care and then started laying into me and being really aggressive, "why can't I give her a break, it is really hard to get childcare". I politely put her on hold and went to one of the coordinators, "I don't know what to do with this phone call and I feel bad for her". They were like "just hang up on her. It is just not worth it; no one deserves to be treated that way or talked to like that, so just hang up" [laughs]* (Susie, Volunteer Member, Office).

A member hearing this story would probably laugh immediately at the irony of the punch line, their laughter an affirmation that it was the person on the phone who had infringed dominant meanings and understandings at the Coop. There was no service dynamic within the organization and all members were expected to cooperate and treat others with respect.

5.11 Funny Stories Structure Understandings

This section discusses how funny stories became resources that helped maintain the dominant discourses upon which they were founded (Fairclough, 1992). Stories permeated the organization, creating frames of references through which members maintained preferred understandings and identities. This is reflected in the two following stories, both of which became folklore (Boje, 1995) or sacred texts (Thornborrow and Brown, 2009) that acted as filters (Giddens, 1991) to discipline interpretations of being a Coop member in "good-standing" (Foucault, 1977). Funny stories allowed members to comprehend how their views related to others, so that the organization became partly constituted by the things members found humorous (Fineman and Gabriel, 1996: 23). This often signalled the mobilisation of dominant discourses that shaped perspectives and established which behaviours constituted membership of the community (cf. Fournier, 1999). A story could be amusing for multiple reasons, but some became embedded in the organizations history due to the scale of the

infraction, circulating and informing understandings.

Vignette No. 4 - For the Record (The Most Shifts Owed Medal of Distinction)

I was working in the office, when one of the full time coordinators exclaimed "29" and started to laugh. She had a member on the phone who was complaining that she had arrived at the Coop to shop, but had been informed that her membership had been suspended due to the make-up rule: *"Our Coop is only open to members, and all adult members are required to work unless they are on parental leave or are disabled" (Holtz, 2003: 1)*. It transpired that through some incredible feat of ingenuity, this member had appeared to do the impossible and continued shopping even though she and her partner had broken the central tenet, "you need to work to shop" and built up a "record breaking" 29 missed shifts between their household (Appendices 11.1). My self and other members working in the office gathered around the telephone and listened to one side of the exchange. The coordinator put down the phone and gave us all the run down to much laughter. The member, it turned out, had decided to use the household's get out of jail card, a one off amnesty, and after a six month period, they would both be reinstated, back on "terra firma", "in-good-standing", with no make ups owing:

> *"Our members rely on one another to share the work of running our Coop and of contributing to its success. The benefit of this shared responsibility is two-fold, the most obvious being that with scheduled, reliable member labour we are able to keep our payroll costs down, which translates to low prices. But another equally important reward comes from the satisfaction we receive from working together as a community to build something upon which we can all rely" (The Coop Membership Manual).*

The household did not simply break a formal rule or overstep informal understandings. They had continually flaunted one of the key foundations of the organizations' success and history. All members were conscious of the central and sacred organizational text, that in order to be a member "in-good-standing" your household needed to fulfil their work commitment:

> *"That's when everybody is suddenly paying attention…. everybody has cued in and something real is finally happening and it's that disparity, that incongruity that creates a moment….. incongruity can create those comedic moments and that creates a bonding because there is only so many of us that perceive it that same way"* (Tony, Volunteer Member, Office).

Already widespread throughout the organization, a few weeks later the story appeared in the Coop newspaper, cementing it in history:

> *"For the record, the most shifts owed medal of distinction is held by a couple who owed in the high twenties, but were too busy to be interviewed at the time of publication and wondered if they could do it next time"* (Making up with the Coop, The Linewaiters Gazette, 01/ 26/2012).

When a funny story about breaking rules became cemented in the minds of members, it acted as an extremely powerful trope, influencing how people thought about the organization and their relationship to others (Weick, 2001). Certain funny stories were repeated to the point where they became an integral part of the history of the organization (Boje, 1995). The following story was related throughout the organization and has passed into folklore at the Coop, even finding its way into an article in the New York Times:

> *"While Coop members can work other members' shifts, they should not be paid for doing so. That rule was passed in November 2000, after one member's child was caught advertising that he would work shifts for a fee"* (New York Times: At a Food Coop, a Discordant Thought: Nannies Covering Shifts, February 2011).

> *"If you could afford the 15 bucks to hire a 14-year-old named Matthew Malter Cohen, he would do your shift for you. Yes, in the days before The New York Times wrote articles about nannies doing their employer's shifts for them and people quitting under the crushing burden of work slots, there was one enterprising young high school boy whose melodic name lives on as an echo of halcyon days gone by: when, for the price of groceries, you would buy your way out of 10 makeups. According to legend, Matthew Malter Cohen got so busy that he recruited his friends to serve the needs of the needy workforce of the Park Slope Food Coop, taking a cut of their wages. Also according to urban myth, it seemed like whole general meetings were devoted to debating whether it was kosher to have a Matthew Malter Cohen on hand. At his height, he worked eight shifts a week for his parents' friends and their friends, who told two friends about it and so on. He was trained to be everywhere except the childcare room, and even pinched hit as a squad leader a few times. Matthew Malter Cohen is still a Coop member. And no, he's not a pimp or CEO of a diamond mining operation in Ecuador. He's a neuroscientist with a wife and a new baby"* (The Linewaiter Gazette, 12 July 2012).

Certain funny stories became influential in the formation and maintenance of dominant discourses at the Coop, shaping how members perceived their actions in relation to others (Grant *et al*., 2004).

5.12 Conclusion

This chapter was constructed to reveal how members used humour as a sensemaking device to construct and maintain views and understandings in relation to others (Kondo, 1990: 302). The sections explored what members found funny and discussed many of the reoccurring themes that influenced dominant outlooks (Silverman, 2000: 123). These frames of reference had become dominant in the organization (Giddens, 1979: 92) and members discussed how they used humour as a medium for the transfer of ideas and perspectives in concert with other likeminded people to shape meanings and discourses informally. Officially sanctioned organizational discourses structured perspectives, but these were subject to interpretation (Clegg, 1989). Jokes, stories and shared laughter were constructed from competing discourses, opening up new and interesting ways to comprehend "what it meant to be a member" in relation to others (Starkey and McKinlay, 1998: 231). Members talked about how they mobilised humour to constitute understandings and perspectives, an abstract filter (Giddens, 1991) through which members interpreted dominant discourse and organizational texts, *"…for me, humour seems to be more of an engagement process, but engagement in an abstract dimension"* (Gary, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

Humour and laughter were a persistent influence in the formation of identities and this was reflected in the ways in which members constructed themselves as organizational insider. A strong sense of community was a key construct in the formation of organizational selves, but rather than simply constraining, the dominant discourses governing *"being a member of our community"* (Barry, Full Time General Coordinator) acted as a resource for humour, *"at an unconscious level, it is like Oscar Wilde; making fun of people, making fun of social norms.... it provides this release and we are not all quite as buttoned up as before; that release is like a tyre deflating"* (Susie, Volunteer Member, Office). Within the things members found funny were perspectives on how to act in the company of others, so that being flexible enough "to fit in" became a key factor in how members constructed themselves. The dominant discourses that this inspired affected how members interpreted officially sanctioned rules and created a fluid interplay between structure and agency, where perspectives were shaped and structured through discourses established organically by members making sense of their surroundings through the contradictions inherent in all dominant discourse (Bolton, 2005: 144), so that language was constantly caught in a mutual embrace (Zizek, 1999), both constraining and enabling, creating interesting and dynamic relations of power in spaces constituted a sense of mutual authority (Clegg *et al.*, 2006: 121).

Humour and laughter affected the Coop, an organization where language was the primary medium of social control and power (Fairclough, 1989) and the findings presented provide a comprehensive background for the detailed accounts that follow in the next two chapters, the first of which examines the power in humour (Deetz, 1992) to construct a comprehensive analysis of the ways humour and laughter were used to constitute relations of power (Foucault, 1980). The final findings chapter examines how members comprehended and mobilised humour to construct their identities (Holmes, 2000). Humour allowed members to author cohesive identities at the Coop, constructed through relations of power that were formed, interpreted and sustained by members conveying their social selves in concert with others (Fineman and Gabriel, 1996: 23).

6. The Power in Humour and Laughter

6.1 Introduction

This chapter draws on my engagement with the literature examining relations of power (Foucault, 1977; 1980; 1991) and explores how members mobilised the "power in" humour to influence meanings and views (Deetz, 1992). I examine the ways in which organizational members explained the influence of humour and laughter on their perspectives and build on the previous chapter, by focusing on the multiple ways in which relations of power were transmitted and shaped by humour at the Coop (Foucault, 1991: 177). Relations of power shaped members interactions and this was evident in the ways members shared certain outlooks on how humour and laughter were constituted at the Coop (Gubrium and Holstein, 2003: 219).

The chapter aims to provide insight into how humour and laughter shape and discipline dominant discourses at the Coop. Members talk about the dynamic ways in which humour mobilises the "power in" discourse and construct humour as an influential resource within relations of power. The first section (6.2) examines members talk about being drawn to those people who share a similar sense of humour. Members speak about being charmed and absorbed by humour, so that their attention is captured in ways that shape relationships and perspectives. The next section (6.3) examines the shared perspective that those who can deliberately make others laugh are afforded a degree of status within the organization. Participants talk about the affect humour has on others and construct those who create humour and laughter as influential. Section (6.4) examines how participants construct humour as an ingenuous form of communication that resonates with others. Dominant discourses constitute talk about humour connecting people by providing a sense of veracity. Members talk about humour as if it were a "system of truth" (Foucault, 1990) through which people transmit, acknowledge and accept "social facts" intuitively. Section (6.5) examines how participants construct humour as a device that allows them to test boundaries and comprehend the views and characteristics of other members. Members talk about the ways humour allows them to realise connections and gain important insights into the views and opinions of others in the organization. Section (6.6) builds on this to examine the power in laughter, a form of communication that draws participants' attention. Members talk about the ways shared laughter acts as a signal that outlooks and emotions are being shared and discuss how they are influenced by the laughter of others. This is examined further within section (6.7), where members talk about humour being a natural and instinctive source of influence within social

interactions. Participants talk about humour changing the emotional tone and providing discrete signals that induce mutual understandings. Section (6.8) examines the ways humour was constructed as a form of resistance that allowed members to interact reflexively with dominant discourses, weakening the grip of organizational texts. This theme is expanded in the final section (6.9), which examines how dominant discourses on "socialism" from wider society are mobilised through humour, in ways that weaken organizational texts and allow members to connect through their sense of incongruity. Members talk about competing discourses that foster an environment of ambivalence.

The findings in this chapter highlight how members of the Coop construct humour and laughter to privilege certain discursive formations (Foucault, 1977), allowing humour to become a medium of social control and power (Fairclough, 1989). Members talk about how they construct humour to make sense of their surroundings (Tracy *et al*., 2006: 283); to privilege certain conceptions (Mitchell *et al.*, 1986); to add influence to their perspectives (Richardson, 1990: 25); to undermine representations of reality (Gabriel, 1995: 484) and to provide discrete outlooks (Edwards *et al.*, 1995). While humour is bound by officially sanctioned discourses that create power effects (Giddens, 1984), many participants talk about humour constituting alternative perspectives that allow members to reinterpret discourses and transmit competing standpoints, some of which have become dominant within the organization (cf. Collinson, 1988; Watson, 1994).

6.2 Humour Constructed as Engaging and Absorbing

Members constructed humour as a device to attract, occupy and hold the attention of others. Humour creates an absorbing interplay, drawing people in so that they are more involved and engaged (Holmes & Marra, 2002): *"I feel like that [humour] is my thing; I value it; I am drawn to humour and funnier people; I am engaged by that; my synapses start firing when people are funny…. it is also a natural way of thinking for me"* (Karine, Full Time Coordinator). This "power in" humour represented an influential and absorbing discursive formation that shaped interactions (Deetz, 1992). As Matt exemplifies:

> *"Humour demonstrates a speed of thought; a general quickness and also the ability to look at things from different perspectives. So generally, those people are going to be the more interesting people to converse with, regardless of whether it is a serious topic or not. Subsequently, I am definitely drawn to people who make jokes"* (Matt, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

Most interviewees felt humour and laughter was extremely relevant to how they engaged others. Humour and laughter were framed by the dominant discourses available to members, so that humour was often constructed by interviewees as implicit, inclusive and influential within relationships. As Sandra explains:

> *"Some people come in there [the office], they don't laugh at all; they are just kind of serious…. they don't seem as full to me; they don't seem as three or four dimensional. I feel like something is missing from their personality and I can't quite connect with them as well, because I can't joke around with them"* (Sandra, Full Time Coordinator).

As Billy illustrates, many interviewees constructed humour as a vehicle to create mutuality, understanding and trust (Goffman, 1961: 97):

> *"Going over the wall of that defence people have, if they don't know whether or not you are a threat, whether you are friend or foe, then people often times have their walls up.... it [humour] is a sign saying "hey, I'm a friend"; "I'm on your side"; "I understand" or "I guess you get it too""* (Billy, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

As Sid explains, humour invites people into perspectives, by creating a dialogue where attention is held and involved, so that views and meanings coalesce in ways that form associations (De Sousa, 1987: 290):

> *"It gets to the point that laughter is a connection; it is visceral; it is in your body, your body actually feels different when you are laughing and you are releasing endorphins. The person next to you on the shift that makes you laugh gives you some distance from what you are doing and makes time go by faster. If you are open to it and smart enough about it or inclined towards it, you fire something back and then you get another ten minutes of that glow and you can run on a little bit, thinking about what they said and what was funny and how do I respond to that; it is like a chess game. Then maybe a conversation breaks out over there about it and you hang back and listen for a while; do you hear something that is a flag? Then you hear something that engages you mentally and laughter makes you feel good, so you get engaged pretty quickly"* (Sid, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

Humour creates interplay, because in order to participate, the parties involved are actively engaged at an emotional level (Bolton, 2005). Interviewees discussed how they were charmed and absorbed by humour, so that their attention was captured in a meaningful way (McLeod, 1994: 151):

> *"As a form of communication, humour can be emotional, in that it binds people together. I know that if I am joking around with someone…. I am going to be a lot more emotionally connected to them, because we share the same humour"* (Sally, Volunteer Member, Shopping).

Here, Karen constructs humour as an influential and absorbing way to engage with dominant discourses at the Coop:

> *"It is like a parent toddler interaction, where there are a set of rules that we operate within to have this relationship with each other. The child is going to forget about that and the parent is going to remind them gently. However, the child is also going to remind the parent that "even though you are telling me this, I do not want to do that and so I am not going to respond appropriately or in a way that is appropriate for you. I am going to push up against that boundary and play". There is humour in that interaction, because there is a level of play to it*

and some give and take to that. Will I surprise you? Will you respond differently? Will you bend the rule this time? Will you give me that little wink and let me get away with it?" (Karen, Volunteer Member, Office).

As Mark explains, members engaged with dominant organizational discourses and invited others into their perspectives in ways that provided a hook for the transmission of discrete and often enduring frames of reference:

"If you are trying to make your point, the way that you are going to get that through, is by engaging people and one of the best ways to do that non-directly (the backdoor way) is to make them laugh…. If you joke about it and people start laughing, even if they do not realise it, they are in some sense agreeing with you and it shapes their view, so that they might then talk to someone else and engage them in the same way" (Mark, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

As Rob explains, when a member engaged others through an insider joke or through irony or understatement, they were sharing perspectives, while allowing others to take ownership, so that the joke became absorbing, inclusive and complicit (Holmes, 2000: 180):

"People have to be actively engaged and people like to be in on a joke together. By saying something ironically, I am giving you the satisfaction of my saying you are smart enough to get this and we are part of this" (Rob, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

Humour invited a degree of participation from others; "do you agree; understand; find it funny; find me funny", so that signs were many to many (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000: 39). The things others found funny had an important affect on relationships and meanings, because finding something funny requires a degree of effort to determine meanings, often becoming an instinctual and natural process through self-discipline (Foucault, 1991: 173):

"It's a natural inclination. I don't think I always had it though. I was one of those people when I was younger, maybe we all are, I wouldn't quite get the joke; so then I worked at it. I noticed that when you get the joke and you'd make a joke, then it kind of brings people together and you start making friends; you start making more connections that way. So I don't know if it was initially natural, but I find it comes very easily, especially if there is somebody else with a quick sense of humour. He or she'll say something and I don't know what happens; it just

> *comes into my head and I shoot it back. I have a line; I have a comeback; sometimes I have to think about it, but let's say at least 75% of the time, I don't have to think about it anymore; it just comes to me"* (Sandra, Full Time Coordinator).

To conclude, members constructed humour as an important form of social engagement that allowed them to strengthen, transform and influence relationships. Interviewees discussed how they were drawn to humour, so that the things others found funny became a hook for the transmission of views and ideas, some of which came to shape dominant discourses at the Coop (Giddens, 1981: 27).

6.3 All Animals are Equal, but Some are More Equal Than Others

Members talked about how humour provided an element of control within situations that allowed them to influence others through the reciprocity of feeling that often seemed apparent in shared laughter (Goffman, 1961: 97). Members were structured through dominant discourses governing "cooperation" and "equality", but equality to a degree: *"We are all equal, so how do I get ahead, how do I identify myself as more equal than you*?" (Charles, Volunteer Member, Food Processing). Interviewees discussed using humour to socially engage others in ways that influenced and sustained perspectives at the Coop and for many informants, the ability to *"find the humour in things"* (Susie, Volunteer Member, Office) affected a member's status within the organization:

> ***"****If you are able to tell a joke or be the joke and have people follow that joke and laugh, or respond to that joke…. it is control; it is attention and that is power"* (Stella, Volunteer Member, Office).

> *"You get a lot more buy-in; it's about connection and about redirecting; guiding or getting what you need or want from people. That is my experience; it builds a kind of social credit with people"* (James, Volunteer Member, Orientations).

The Coop is an organization built on central tenets of equity and equality, discourses that extend beyond the confines of the organization to include its suppliers and affiliates: *"What if Animal Farm was a grass-fed, cage-free, sustainably-raised, humane, locally-grown farm?" [Laughs]* (Charles, Volunteer Member, Food Processing). Full time coordinators and volunteer squad leaders had a degree of authority, but all members enacted power through the transmission of dominant discourses: *"Power produces; it produces reality; it produces*

domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that may be gained of him belong to this production" (Foucault, 1991: 194). As Sarah exemplifies, many interviewees eschewed exercising formal authority in favour of using humour to engage other members with discourses that centred on cooperation, mutuality and reciprocation:

> *"There are enough people at the Coop who are sensitive to a tone of voice or being asked to do something…. It has made me sensitive to how I speak to people, so you have to feel everybody out first"* (Sarah, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

Most participants were aware of these central tenets, constituted through official organizational texts and discourse. As Laura exemplifies, rather than exercise formal authority, it was common practice to mobilise humour to influence others:

> *"The squad leader asked someone to switch jobs and the person said they did not want to, so he said something like "we are all co-operators here and that is not what a co-operator does" [laughs]* (Laura, Volunteer Member, Childcare).

Within what made others laugh was a sense of authority; a sense of status within the group (Holmes, 2000: 179). As James explains, when others responded to his sense of humour, it felt as though he received a certain degree of status:

> *"When people are laughing, I feel like they are with me and I have some status or standing with them"* (James, Volunteer Trainer, Orientations).

What members found funny and how they presented that to others often revealed the trappings of dominant discourses (Westwood, 2004: 777), so that the ability to make others laugh was an act of power:

> *"In a work situation, humour can really bond you about the universality of life and those who can show that to the best effect and the cleverest way have the most power…. If you can do that in a glib and lucid manner then that is really powerful for those of us who are hungry for that"* (Sid, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

Here, Sid discusses how humour brings others into his sphere; into his way of seeing. While this reciprocity may be fleeting, laughter becomes an important feedback loop that reinforces and strengthens his perception that he has created traction with others going forward:

> *"People project energy onto the person who is being funny and they get bigger…. this is a metaphysical proposition; it is like as people project on to you that you are great, "you are a great writer", the more people that say you are a great writer, you become a great writer. Not only does your writing improve, but it escalates and there is an energy to that. A funny person gets that. People almost give you a piece of themselves, because they invest in you. That person when they come into the Coop the next time, their stature is a little higher, they get something from it, they get more power, more lenience, more authority, it is a strange thing"* (Sid, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

As Sarah illustrates, this "power in" humour was enhanced by a member's confidence within the group, so that their charisma, likeability, reciprocity, wit, social acumen and tacit knowledge allowed certain members to implicitly exhibit traits of leadership (Zaccaro, 2007). Humour grounded in the experiences of others could often forge *"feelings of participation, engagement, interest, visibility and respect",* traits that presented an individual as a natural leader (Alvesson and Sveningsson, 2003: 1453):

> *"There are people who are just really funny and tell jokes all the time…. they become revered, because they tend to be the funniest people and so they are fearless with it"* (Sarah, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

> *"We change the psychology of the situation, because your ability to be funny; your ability to laugh and to get the humour affects your status within the group…. The people able to, in the most sharp, quick, witty, funny way, hit the nail on the head…. would be the leader in a certain way, because they have the ability to articulate something that other people have just been vaguely aware of. That's what humour does, it just zaps in articulation and puts something into focus…. it just crystallises meaning in a way that we often don't really articulate that well for ourselves; it's like a poem, it does it economically"* (Sarah, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

Vignette No. 5 – Significant Others

It is a Thursday afternoon and I am sat in the Coop office taking phone requests from other members. I am sweating, even though I am wearing shorts and a tee shirt. There are skylights open and large ceiling fans turn over head, circa a 1960's hospital room, the dim yellow light is supplied by strip-lighting; its glow may well be white, but the painted yellow walls give it a sickly hue. At this time there is no air con in the office and this is summertime New York. Those who can afford it have escaped the city for the Hamptons or Long Island Sound, but I have swerved doing a Great Gatsby in favour of an FTOP credit (Appendices 11.1) and an afternoon in the company of my Coop peers…. I like this time of year, the city takes on a more relaxed edge and long trousers are shelved until autumn. I also like this shift; a favourite for me and the other regulars. We sit around the edge of the office, the shift schedules above our heads, lazily helping members locate squad openings. The phones buzz and one of us laconically picks up, taking a message if the query is directed at a particular coordinator. It is the office coordinators' monthly meeting and so as usual, Kenneth and Barry supervise from behind the coordinator desks in the middle. They are usually found in the basement, supervising receiving shifts and so they take a more relaxed stance to office duties. Right now Kenneth is playing guitar and singing a self-composed children's song, in between idly swapping witty retorts with Barry. This creates a unique atmosphere:

> *"….it [humour] definitely defines the energy of the room. I notice the people who want to be a part of it, but can't tap into it, because it is not their style. Others are on that wavelength themselves and jump in, while others don't want to be part of it"* (Barry, Full Time Coordinator).

The office feels different and members are keen to be part of it, *"you want to be careful to keep the balloon in the air, there is a sense of collective desire, once it's up to keep it up and not kill the vibe"* (Sid, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing). This collective vibe signifies that we are on the same page, *"we want to cooperate through humour.... you want to feed off each other"* (Barry, Full Time Coordinator). This process begins with Kenneth, *"he is impossible to keep up with, so I see working with Kenneth as a challenge... I definitely conform to his style…. I am allowing myself to enter more into his space and fall under his umbrella, to try and be loose and free enough to allow myself to compete in that arena"* (Barry, Full Time Coordinator). The phones keep buzzing, people keep working, Kenneth and Barry field questions from members who come in, yet the spirit of cooperation is constituted through the constant humour, inspired by Kenneth, we fall in line, so that *"the vibe comes first"* (Mandy, Volunteer Member, Office). Kenneth's sense of humour appeals to me and I usually intuitively catch and comprehend the humour in what he says, so that sometimes, it is only me and Barry laughing:

> *"I realized that I was not listening closely enough and it is so dry and dead pan that you are caught off guard and might miss him (Kenneth) smiling at the end, you can totally miss him…. you see that and realize "oh my God, that was humorous", he is not serious and you can laugh"* (Jackie, Full Time General Coordinator).

To me, Kenneth's most important attribute is there is very little he will not laugh and joke about. It is a constant, no matter the situation or company and that influences others to get into that same rhythm, *"he is unstoppable"* (Barry, Full Time Coordinator). As we joke and laugh, I begin to embrace that side of my personality more. My perspective has shifted slightly through my association with him and Barry, *"you create common ground within each other, to build these jokes around. We have things that we know, believe and like, but*

we have also created things within ourselves that are between us" (Sean, Volunteer Member, Receiving). I have not become a different person, it is a subtle change, because I usually look for common ground with others and humour is an effective way to do that. For me, humour is a better way to exist:

> *"....if you watch that man [Kenneth] go around the Coop, the amount of positive energy that goes towards him…. I am in awe of how much positive energy and the love for him. It is just who he is as a person and the way he interacts with people…. I hope one day I will have as many positive interactions"* (John, Full Time Coordinator).

Then as the shift nears its end, the regular office coordinators return from their meeting. I ask what the meeting was about and Ava cheerfully tells me, *"we have been discussing ways to improve the dynamic between full time coordinators and members"* [volunteers who make up the office squads in the office].

Many interviewees said they believed the things they said to make others laugh influenced views, because there was a sense of acceptance and consensus that transcended formal structures:

> *"It feels like acceptance, they are enjoying you and feel comfortable with you. You are part of the group and you feel this cohesion"* (Kate, Full Time Coordinator).

> *"It is like an asymmetric force, where people who do not have any structural power, can wield other power…. a simple joke can make somebody's very serious and stern thing just go away in a puff of smoke, can totally deflate the perceived authority of it"* (Charles, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

Members constructed the ability to make others laugh as a form of influence that constituted status within the organization. Humour was often constructed through dominant discourses that lent power to perspectives (Mumby, 2001: 595), so that those members who were able to foster discrete connections that others found funny maintained a degree of influence within relationships.

6.4 The Truth is a Funny Thing

Members constructed humour as a more open and truthful expression of reality: *"Genuine and spontaneous humour is very difficult if you are trying to be someone you are not"* (Rob, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing). Humour is a mode of communication that resonates with people, constituted through discourses that lend a sense of realism to perspectives (Clegg *et al.*, 2006: 131). Humour and its various modes of expression often echo those dominant discourses that are seen to author reality, creating a sense that *"if we can laugh at it [humour] then it is probably because it is true" [laughs]* (Milla, Full Time Coordinator). Relations of power that provide "policies of truth" (Fournier, 1999) allowed humour to feel relevant, especially when a sentiment or perspective connected with others: *"....each [humorous] statement contains its own truths. If we attend to these statements, and piece together their various truths from clues within the contexts of their expression, we can tap into a rich source of information for understanding the dynamics of individual and group life in organizations"* (Kahn, 1989: 46). As Laura illustrates, the discursive practice of joking and laughing often connected shared impressions:

> *"We had a childcare shift the other day and there were no kids. It is not often like that, but there are usually only a few kids and so it is the easiest shift and is like this great secret. The squad leader came in and the three of us were sitting there on our phones with no kids and he said "this is the best kept secret in the Coop" and we all just cracked up. We had been caught, and we knew that it was true, so we all started laughing. There was the discomfort, in that we had been busted, so we were laughing out of discomfort, but we were also laughing because it was true" [laughs]* (Laura, Volunteer Member, Childcare).

As Sid exemplifies, interviewees often constructed their own humour as authentic, conscious that it reflected their identity in some way:

> *"I have to think about it and find my position on it and then join in the humour, but hold my position, where I do not feel like I sold out on my own thoughts; sold out my own truth"* (Sid, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

There was a perception amongst members that humour generally needed to author reality in some way in order to draw and hold attention (Clegg, *et al*., 2006: 131). When humour resonated with others; added up; echoed others' own experiences; captured that person's personality; reflected their background or solidified a shared understanding, other members often constructed the statement as "truthful" or that person as genuine. As Rob explains:

> *"It is very hard to be disingenuous and still be genuinely funny; it is very hard not to be genuine with what you think"* (Rob, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

Humour did not need to be sincere in order to provide realism to perspectives. Rather, it needed to resonate with other people, performing much like a trope in the comprehension of reality (Oswick, 2006: 458):

> *"People laugh at true things, especially where you show that something is true, not just tell it. I find the best laughs come from making unexpected, true observations and demonstrating them; laughter is an acknowledgement of that shared truth"* (Fleur, Volunteer Member, Receiving).

As Sid explains, humour and laughter often allowed serious views to emerge contextually, so that rather than stymied by relations of power, ideas took shape in a more open and mutual environment:

> *"You get to more serious things that way too. A really good humorous conversation can end up with you finding yourself in a very serious subject. People open up, because you made them laugh and shared something. You can create trust even with a joke* (Sid, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

This does not necessarily mean others agreed with a perspective wrapped in humour or altered their own views in the process of laughing, but it opened up the possibility to engage with the organization, its dominant discourses and others reflexively (Vince, 1996: 75):

> *"You are putting yourself on the line when you are telling a joke, because you are saying this is what I think about this environment and situation. When you throw a joke out there, you are asking "does anyone else feel me on this" and if you get some collective laughter, then you know that you are not on your own"* (Susie, Volunteer Member, Office).

Members talked about being drawn to the perspectives within humour and understood humour as a coded message, where some people were kept at arm's length, because the social truth was shrouded. There, but shared and implicit, so that while a funny comment might indicate a "true" thought or feeling, it still needed to be interpreted (cf. Fleming and Sewell, 2002). As Fleur explains:

> **"***The truth may hurt or be too much to bear, so you cloak it in humour, because it is easier. It is often interpreted as not being true, but jokes are very telling, even if people are not aware of that; it usually comes from a true place"* (Fleur, Volunteer Member, Receiving).

This search for veracity was structured by *"rules according to which the true and false are separated and specific effects of power are attached to the true"* (Foucault, 1980; 132). For many informants, the sound and appearance of laughter was very revealing:

> *"It [laughter] sounds like agreement. Sometimes people laugh because they want to and you perceive that as being agreement…. you can tell by the sound of laughter, what kind of laughter it is…. there are different tones and pitches and sounds"* (Sandra, Full Time Coordinator).

When a member constructed humour as a social truth, the laughter of others acted as a form of acknowledgement, their laughter providing a sense of agreement: *"Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true"* (Foucault, 1984: 72-73). As Chris and Rob illustrate by talking about "The Daily Show", humour and laughter were seen to transmit authenticity and agreement, constituting a system of truth (Foucault, 1990):

> *"A lot of people from our generation, loosely speaking, get their news from The Daily Show. In some ways it is a more sincere way, maybe more aware, than conventional television news…. The reason humour resonates with people is it hits on some truth in an unexpected way"* (Chris, Volunteer Member, Shopping).

> *"The people that prepare politicians and prepare people to work with the media are very good at it now…. there is very little the nightly news can do, because they are under intense pressure to present both sides of every issue, even if one side is completely wrong. It ends up negating their real mission; of presenting the truth or the real information…. that is why The Daily Show is a better source…. Using humour makes it easier; makes it more countable as viewer; makes it harder to ignore; it wakes you up; it makes you realise how much you are being lied to…. Irony in that sense is very valuable, because forces that keep the truth from people, on both political parties are very strong and very effective, and humour is the only way to cut through that"* (Rob, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

Relations of power shaped how members talked about humour, with many voicing dominant discourses that centred on mutuality, honesty and openness (Westwood, 2004: 777). Members constructed humour as a mode of expression that fostered a sense of "truth" and this allowed members to constitute discrete views in concert with others, conscious that laughter acted as a form of agreement.

6.5 Humour Examines Boundaries

This section examines how members constructed humour as a window into the views and understandings of others. These insights were structured through dominant discourses that provided a contact point for perspectives and meanings (Foucault, 1980). This "power in" humour allowed members to construct humour as a means of testing other's boundaries. Members talked about the ways in which humour acted as a conduit for the assimilation of a variety signs, allowing them to discern *"true or real attitudes, beliefs and emotions…. through what appears to be involuntary expressive behaviour"* (Goffman, 1959: 11-12). As Jenny exemplifies, humour, like the game "craps", does not require that all players roll the dice, so that it is not simply the person joking who gains insight:

> ***"****I did not like being the butt of jokes and so I am maybe more in tune to that. It is also life experience and becoming more aware of what other people are feeling; seeing how humour is used"* (Jenny, Full Time Coordinator).

Here, Fred constructs humour as a window into the views and qualities of other members. Explaining how when a member is attuned to the reactions of others, then humour becomes a signal for interactions going forward:

> ***"****If you joke about a thing that you think relates to that person and they do not laugh, then you can step back and say, "maybe I do not connect with this person on that level". If you are the kind of person who can read people (I know a lot of people who take pride in that), then that can be a window into their attitudes. I agree with that, but most people make a joke just to relieve the tension or break the ice, more than asking "are you one of my people?""* (Fred, Volunteer Member, Office).

Members constructed humour as a "private way in" that allowed them to comprehend others in a meaningful way. For many interviewees, this process was reflexive, intuitive and sometimes subconscious rather than a deliberate act (Freud, 1905), so that humour and laughter became extremely influential in how members comprehended others:

> *"I think it is more of a side-effect.... it is a way for people to relate to each other, without touching on subjects when they are not sure how others feel about it; it sets the tone…. it is telling; what do people find humorous; what does it say about their personality; where they are from; how they relate to the world"* (Susie, Volunteer Member, Office).

As Sarah explains, humour and laughter allowed members to fluidly comprehend possible commonalities or disconnections, presenting a thread, where the reaction of others provided numerous social indicators, processed implicitly to furnish a kind of short hand. In that moment individuals had communicated outlooks and characteristics, to provide a possible glimpse of their inner-nature, their identity and how they related to others (Goffman, 1959: 11-12). When other members withheld laughter or did not get the joke, then the short hand was no less revealing (Billig, 2005: 179):

> *"It has to do with strongly held values, so whatever things we joke about in life bonds you and aligns you in a certain form of thinking. Humour is a fast way to do that, because a joke will establish that much faster than a whole conversation…. It is there in the moment; it is a short hand that people understand implicitly"* (Sarah, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

As the following comments exemplify, members often perceived humour as socially significant, because it helped them paint a social landscape, where their attention was drawn to details revealed by their own brush strokes:

> *"Who are you working with; talking to and interacting with? You learn by the way people respond to the different things you say and what they are ready for"* (Brenda, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

> *"In a sense you have psychologically examined this person or group of people and can pick them apart a little bit, "I know what is going to push your buttons, to make you happy, sad or upset"* (Rich, Volunteer Member, Office).

As Jackie illustrates, some members described using humour to deliberately test others boundaries, purposely revealing part of themselves in the process, so that humour allowed them to establish the parameters of a relationship:

> **"***You are figuring out who your allies are, because you need allies at work. So you use humour to gauge who gets it; who doesn't; who reacts…. I don't know what it is, but they are so serious about stuff that I really have to watch myself around them, because they do not get "me" at all"* (Jackie, Full Time General Coordinator).

For many members, humour was an important way to challenge others meaningfully, because a reaction could indicate whether "this person relates to me"; whether "I fit in with the group"; whether "she is comfortable in my presence"; whether "he likes me" etc. (Davis, 1993: 270):

> *"You use humour to test people out; to see what parts of their personality are superficial; whether they are actually much cooler than they appear or whether they are less cool than they appear. All those things are tested out and you start to bond with the people that you get on well with, as a result of pushing those limits through humour"* (Matt, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

> *"As soon as you make somebody laugh, they are not even going to remember what you said, they are just going to remember that they think you are funny. If we think somebody is funny, we like them, because we can't laugh at somebody that we don't like; we don't want to, we are resistant to it"* (Tony, Volunteer Member, Office).

Interviewees often constructed humour as a subtle contact point, as jokes mobilised social discourses without the need to actively challenge others directly:

> *"People always have their lines and generally, they are not obvious, until you say a joke and it becomes very obvious from the reaction they have"* (Charles, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

> *"You can see their response and for me, it is a kind of game, "what is with this group; what is the thing that has take-up; does this kind of humour get a laugh? "No? All right, this kind of humour? Oh, all right, there it is"* (James, Volunteer Member, Orientations).

As Leo explains, humour represents our limitless and inescapable capacity to alter and shape reality in ways that reveal views and understandings, because those are the rules of the game (Fineman and Gabriel, 1996: 23):

> *"In some ways, it is a less threatening way of finding those things out, because when you are joking, it is not entirely clear how committed you are to whatever it is you are saying or the implication of what you are saying. For example, in a relationship, people often joke with each other and pretend to be offended about something; are you really offended; do you want them to know that you are offended; are you not offended; do you want them to know that you are not offended? It is never entirely clear, but it is a way of testing the wires, without committing one way or the other; you draw people out, because when they respond, you see that and can find out if they find the same thing funny"* (Leo, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

Humour allowed members to reflexively engage with others, providing a glimpse of views and understandings that rose to the surface, so that humour acted as an important signal, shaping perspectives and relationships (Goffman, 1959: 10).

6.6 The Power in Laughter

Laughter affected members by drawing attention to the perspectives mobilised in the construction of humour. Relevant and absorbing, laughter often influenced the ways in which interviewees viewed their environment. Shared laughter signalled to members that emotions were being shared (Billig, 2005: 192) and participants spoke about the importance of being attuned to the laughter of others (De Sousa, 1987: 290). Here, Fleur describes shared laughter as an important signal that views coalesce in some way:

> *"If you laugh about something with another person, then it brings you closer, because it is acknowledging commonalities; shared perspectives and finding enjoyment in that. It feels good to laugh and it feels good to bring other people into that"* (Fleur, Volunteer Member, Receiving).

As Sandra explains, laughter sounds like agreement and helps constitute connections, commonalities and disparities:

> *"It brings it front and centre when you laugh at something; it becomes more important than just saying it.... you have more of that connection..... laughter brings people together and in that way it has power; it does add power to what is being said"* (Sandra, Full Time Coordinator).

As Mandy explains, the sound of laughter signalled that people had formed a connection through shared conceptions, so that those listening were disciplined in some way (Fairclough, 1992: 211):

> *"Everyone is vulnerable to laughter and interested in being included; people want to agree with other people that are laughing"* (Mandy, Volunteer Member, Office).

Here, Michael constructs the act of laughing as communal, connecting him to other members. Laughter signals shared outlooks and demonstrates an individual fits in, by divulging implicit understandings (Bergson, 1911: 11):

> *"If you have other people laugh, in the face of the thing, then, you have reflected on this particular thing and have the same worldview. You have found some resonance of your idea, your position or your attitude with other people. You have*

expressed something that resonates with them and that becomes a bond. You are all feeling and recognising the same thing and it is quite dependent on the thing that is being laughed at; that is amusing; it is not necessarily a thing of authority, but it can be a very powerful bond" (Michael, Volunteer Member, Shopping).

As Ellie exemplifies, interviewees understood shared laughter as a natural way to relate. Laughter signalled that people perceived things the same way, disciplining meanings and structuring emotions in the act of sharing mirth (Burchell, 1993: 268):

"It seems like a self-validation thing. I need to check if I am reading the situation accurately, or if my response is appropriate, because if it is appropriate, maybe I can keep it going; or laugh louder; or laugh out loud" (Ellie, Volunteer Member, Office).

These connections and shared perceptions were extremely relevant, adding shape and texture to relations of power. The act of laughter regulates feelings and takes hold of the body, framing perspectives (Foucault, 1991: 173):

"When something happens and for a split second there is silence, it is like no word can be articulated, to put into that thing. Sometimes, there needs to be a sound and that sound is laughter. That is what moves you on. Where words take a little more time for your brain to process, laughter comes from some other part of your body. It doesn't come from up here where you might struggle to find the word in that moment; where something needs to be said; your brain is clicking away, "what is the word", but your body just releases a sound and that is laughter and just moves people on" (Jackie, Full Time General Coordinator).

As James explains, laughter connected feelings and perspectives, a bell jar that amplified and focused attention through the transmittance of shared emotions (Goffman, 1961: 97):

"It intensifies that feeling I am having, so that if I am feeling some deep emotion about it, when I feel that gentle relating, it intensifies that as well like an amplifier" (James, Volunteer Member, Orientations).

Vignette No. 6 - The General Meeting before "The" General Meeting: Where members will vote on whether to vote on banning Israeli goods from the store's shelves (due to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank).

This is my first monthly General Meeting, a place that constitutes *"the spiritual core of the Coop"* (Chris, Volunteer Member, Shopping). I have put off coming several times, the guilt finally motivating me to spend three hours [on a rainy Tuesday evening] listening to other members voice their opinions and ideas for the Coop: *"Be prepared to stay for a while, I think it's going to be a long one" [laughs]* (Leo, Volunteer Member, Food Processing). I have heard mixed reviews from other members:

> *"I have not gone to a General Meeting and people tell me polar opposite things…. a friend who is a very bright musician said "I go to the meetings and have pushed this issue of dispensing with plastic bags for bulk items, fruits and vegetables. It is really great!" Then, I was walking home last night from the Coop [with a shopping trolley] and my "walker" [a member who brings the trolley back to the store]…. said "I went to one of the meetings and oh, please, it was unbearable, people get up and go on and on about things that do not make sense or that nobody cares about. It is like the worst thing in the world" [laughs]* (Hattie, Volunteer Member, Office).

I would be receiving a work credit for attending, but I have plenty of those, as I receive a credit for each shift I work during my time working and participating. No, my main motivation is ethnographic. Well that and a good friend Sean agreed to come with me. We laugh easily in each other's company, so we arrive pretty animated about the whole gig: *"Some people were there to be serious and thought about whether we should have plastic bags or not, and then others were there to take the whole thing in as a show"* (Rich, Volunteer Member, Office). Myself and Sean belong firmly in the "I would rather spend my time pretty much anywhere else camp"; or in my case, "I would rather roll naked in saw dust and pet a rabid beaver", so our mutual sense of excitement comes as a bit of a surprise.

Ironically, the hall where the meeting takes place resides in a Park Slope synagogue, for now anyway (as I am sure next month's historic vote has not gone unnoticed). The room is brightly lit and wallpapered throughout in a floral design, possibly a holdover from the buildings construction in the late 19th Century. Members line tables to our left as we walk in, so we head over to give the appearance we know what is going on. Some hand out the agenda and others political leaflets for next month's vote. We head to the man holding the register and then grab a free banana each (always a bonus). We both find the wallpaper disconcerting and there is an obvious lack of chairs to go around, so we quickly take our seats. It is now that we learn for the first time that plastic tear bags are under threat of execution at the Coop. We both agree that we like the plastic tear bags and now simply need to wait roughly three hours before getting the chance to vote in favour of acquittal. Our seats are amongst members, many of whom, to our relief, look like fellow interlopers: *"People who are easy to spot; they are the kids at the back of the classroom"* (Sid, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

We are not the only spectators, another fly on a wall [it turns out] is busy tweeting for an online magazine, *"man gets up and says "Coop should ban Israeli food only if it bans American food, because of the Native American occupation", he's wearing a yarmulke"* (The Awl, The Epic Live Tweeting of Last Night's Park Slope Coop Meeting, 29th February, 2012). While the online journalist types this enthusiastically

into Twitter, Sean and I, without exchanging words, nor glances, both start chuckling instantaneously. A few other members also laugh, but the majority remains silent. All members are asked to reframe from clapping [cheering or jeering] during General Meetings, but this small splatter of laughter breaches no code and appears to stand in need of an echo (Bergson, 1911). I mean, that was funny, right? We are not here to discuss next month's vote on whether to ban Israeli goods: *"The room is tense with passive aggression. Israeli food referendum dominates. Free Oreos given out, but not free hummus"* (The Awl, The Epic Live Tweeting of Last Night's Park Slope Coop Meeting, Carrie Frye, 29th February, 2012). So this and other overzealous rhetoric about Palestine, Israel or Boycotts that follow are met with knowing smiles, a few smirks and faint at first, but mounting laughter…. echoing group sentiments, *"it [laughter] is like music, it can change the atmosphere in the room, without physically changing anything at all"* (Chris, Volunteer Member, Shopping).

A few minutes passes, more members get up to talk "Israel" and we are then reminded by the Chair that we are not here to discuss next month's historic vote and he moves the discussion on to this meetings hot topic, the possible prohibition of plastic roll bags, due to environmental concerns. This it turns out is a long standing debate at the Coop:

> *"The Environmental Committee proposed punitive charges on plastic, and subsidizing the cost of washable, reusable muslin bags. Then came debate. The Better Living through Chemicals camp worried about losing membership because of eco-fascists who admit to hating not just plastic but also "dead" meat, salt, sugar, fluorescent lights, and polyester. The We're Poisoning the World with Every Breath We Take camp said we're poisoning the world with every breath we take. Arguments were surprisingly cogent, though, and many statistics were had by all. When the tide seemed against them, the Environmental Committee abandoned its punitive-surcharge-on-bags proposal in favor of a scorched-earth, but friendly, amendment to ban ALL plastic bags. But it was really late, so it got tabled till the next general meeting on December 27"* (EchoNYC, Let's Have Fun at the Park Slope Food Coop General Meeting, November, 1994).

We are treated to an entertaining discussion of the main salient points by the Environment Committee, who are tabling the motion. This involves plenty of statistics (383 tear bags are used on average every hour; $22,000 per year is spent on providing bags, etc. etc.) and a well presented case for-and-against certain solutions, followed by a brief video projected on to a screen on stage. It is a short skit in the style of recent Oscar winning movie "the Artist", where environmental committee members demonstrate how easy it is to shop without the use of plastic tear bags. Most of the members here clearly enjoy the [surprisingly] polished and occasionally funny short and once it has finished, we settle in, as the real entertainment begins. The chair invites other members to come up and discuss any concerns or proposals of their own:

> *"Man comes up to speak and says that he heard on the news that somebody may have discovered plastic-eating bacteria* (The Awl, The Epic Live Tweeting of Last Night's Park Slope Coop Meeting, Carrie Frye, 29th February, 2012).

We both start laughing and by now plenty of others are joining in, *"it [laughter] is a bit of a Bell Weather, it is a pretty good indication that something is afoot"* (Chris, Volunteer Member, Shopping). Then up pops the woman sitting next to us, *"I work on the checkout, so I am on the frontline… no one wants 10 oranges rolling around"*. Me and Sean are laughing at the "front line" comment, but are pretty much on our own, as it would seem the "Pro Plastic Tear Bags Lobby" are not well represented here. *"Humour can be a*

corrective measure or tests the boundary of what is main stream around here" (James, Volunteer Trainer, Orientations) and this is demonstrated to full effect, when it turns out our neighbour is being sarcastic and goes on:

> *"....or the dreaded wet lettuce, yeh, that's right, you use a paper towel and you wipe the counter, and you know what, you can re-use the paper towel, so it must cost all of 30 cents [laughter].... people are inventing "alleged" problems [laughter], the real problem is those people who come up with a single avocado in a plastic bag [laughter].... [she finishes with a flourish] we are supposed to stand for conserving the environment and the symbolism of getting rid of plastic bags is important".*

Standing ovation… erh, no [we are not allowed to clap], but there are plenty of twinkles [members putting hands above their heads and waggling their fingers in support]. Myself, Sean and others find the twinkles amusing and we are still laughing, as our neighbour reclaims her seat, at which point Sean high-fives her. I tell you, the "Blanket Ban on Plastic Tear Bag Lobby" are acing all the laughs around here and to drive this home, a small woman with a commanding French accent takes the floor:

> *"I have been using the biodegradable plastic bags and they degrade so fast, by the time you are at the checkout you don't know where the bag is"* (The Awl, the Epic Live Tweeting of Last Night's Park Slope Coop Meeting, Carrie Frye, 29th February, 2012).

We both laugh loudly and are not alone [laughter all round]. I miss the next sentence or two as I convulse and regain my senses, just as she starts talking about the benefits of muslin bags:

> *"....you leave them [vegetables] in a plastic bag, they start sweating and are rotten within a couple of days, [pause] and another thing, [showing us her own muslin bag] I put 22 oranges in there, can you believe it?* [low chuckles everywhere] *That is much better than the plastic [tear] bags, and you can close it, [pause] and another thing* [loud laughter all around], *there are so many things, so many things* [I am beside myself with mirth]…. *you cannot see through [muslin]? Of course you can see through [shows her bag's opening] and another thing* [the laughter is now drowning her out] *there are so many plastic bags at the Coop, look at this "a tortilla bag" [she has produced an empty tortilla bag], you bring that in [rather than use a new tear bag] and it even zip locks, you can reuse them, "don't take a picture, my face belongs to me sweetheart"* [someone has tried to take her photo] [the whole room is laughing and some dare clap]…. *you can reuse anything, one day I saw a girl putting two avocadoes in a sock she had brought"* [people everywhere laughing uncontrollably].

She carries on, but I am not listening, I am just laughing. When she finishes, everyone claps in our area. The opposition to the ban begin to organize, *"you are not ordering takeout. You are going home to cook"* (The Awl, the Epic Live Tweeting of Last Night's Park Slope Coop Meeting, Carrie Frye, 29th February, 2012), but it is too little too late. Myself and Sean entered this meeting big fans of the tear bag, but leave disappointed, when we find out we will not get to vote. It turns out, that this was only a meeting to discuss "tear bags" and that a vote on whether to have a vote to vote out tear bags, will be happening some other night….

The sound of laughter indicated that views were shared in that moment, creating a perception amongst interviewees that their own perspective was echoed by other members who found the same things funny. As Mark explains, this sense of agreement was disciplining (Foucault, 1977):

> *"If someone in the group laughs, then you are able to see that there is agreement. Humour provides a point of view" and laughter is basically a bunch of people saying "yes, exactly". Not wanting to be the odd duck, it is very rare that someone cracks a joke about something that is going on and rather than laugh, another person says "no, no, it is not like that at all"; if a person was to butt in and say "I don't agree" and be very serious, then that becomes funny"* (Mark, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

As Mandy exemplifies, interviewees were conscious of laughter and it provided an important impetus for those who felt an innate need to connect and engage reflexively with others:

> *"If some people are laughing, then everyone is like "what are they laughing at? Are they laughing at me? What is going down? What is so fun?" It is an actual event, unlike bull shit work events, where it is like "we are having a conference tomorrow"; who cares! It is something that sort of shoots directly to the personal; even if it is about superficial things. The laughter itself is something that unsettles people; people can feel threatened by that; or excluded by that"* (Mandy, Volunteer Member, Office).

Members constructed laughter as a form of discipline that acted on people wishing to relate with those around them (Foucault, 1988: 18). Laughter represented and amplified shared views and built mutual interpretations: *"It is the basic nature of laughter…. it is a primal action, there is a chemical reaction inside that gives way to feelings of camaraderie and togetherness with the group when you all laugh at the same thing"* (Fred, Volunteer Member, Office).

6.7 Humour Informs Discourse

This section examines how members constructed humour and laughter as modes of influence that helped constitute discourses (Clegg *et al*., 2006). Members spoke about humour being a *"source of power in social interactions"* (Giddens, 1979: 92), providing substance to opinions and adding *"a different dynamic, than just using words to make an argument"* (Paul, Volunteer Member, Office). Dominant discourses are subject to interpretation and reshaped informally by the interplay of dialogue (Smith, 1990: 202). As Ellie illustrates, humour and laughter disciplined perceptions and this was evident in the way members constructed themselves and others as susceptible to humour, influenced by the sound of laughter and careful to avoid being the centre of mirth (Billig, 2005: 199):

> *"It is a very different thing; initiating laughter and being the centre of attention or being the centre of attention because you are being laughed at…. there is often a part of my character that wants to be the centre of attention… but I do everything to avoid it if I think it's because people might be making fun of me or are having a harmless joke at my expense…. did I do something wrong? What are people thinking about me? Hopefully, I will not think about it for too long, because it might torture me"* (Ellie, Volunteer Member, Office).

Here, Fred describes the power in laughter as an internal dialogue that helps structure perspectives. Engaged by his reaction, his feelings become proprietary (Hochschild, 1983: 22):

> *"It [humour] will resonate with you; you found that funny and it made you laugh, so it makes the whole thing feel more relevant in your head, rather than just saying flatly to yourself "this is what I feel""* (Fred, Volunteer Member, Office).

Interviewees identified humour and laughter as persistent influences, shaping outlooks and emphasising mutual viewpoints: *"Everything is about what perspective or slant you take on something, so it is all about spin and that is what we find hysterical; it is all about reframing something"* (Tom, Volunteer Squad Leader, Shopping). As Leo reveals, humour and laughter brought perspectives into focus, acting as a signal that outlooks had been altered in that moment by something people found funny together:

> *"We are part of that reality and our attitudes and thoughts are part of that reality. That has changed and how we are going to act is going to change and that's going to have an impact on people and the things around us"* (Leo, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

For Karen, humour represented an opportunity to construct viewpoints in sync with others:

> ***"****It [humour] is very influential, if you can convey something in a way that gives someone else the permission; or feel like they have permission to laugh; it allows them to own it a little bit, because there isn't any lack of control"* (Karen, Volunteer Member, Office).

Humour and laughter often constitute connection, so that ideas begin to resonate and views coalesce (Albert, Ashforth and Dutton: 14): *"That is where we belong; we belong connecting, because it is way easier to handle the human condition and the reality of life by connection rather than disconnection"* (Sid, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing). Here Rich, speaks about humour and laughter changing the emotional tone in an instant, creating an environment that allows individuals to relate:

> *"It [humour] changes the feeling of the room and it changes the feeling between people; it helps us connect"* (Rich, Volunteer Member, Office).

As Sid illustrates, humour set the emotional tone and constituted whether the experience of working had been rewarding, whether members had related and conversations had been worthwhile:

> *"You are getting something for the time that you're down there [working in the basement] beyond purple kale. Nothing feels better than when you are done, you feel like you just got out of prison [laughs]. You walk out and it is like you just got pardoned by the mayor, my God, I am out [laughs]. Usually you walk out of there a little lighter than when you came in; if the conversation was good; if there were funny things; if there was that connection with people"* (Sid, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

For Fred, humour brings him into other member's sphere of influence, where his views and emotions shape humour's significance:

> **"***People sometimes apply humour and use it to shape their key points. They will find something funny, and take it less seriously and that allows others to be a little more open minded about the topic at hand, "maybe there are some key points that I did not consider; maybe this is not so serious"* (Fred, Volunteer Member, Office).

As the following comments illustrate, humour can create an influential impression or an association that reproduces views and understandings going forward, causing individuals to reflect on its significance to their own perspectives (Foucault, 1977: 27):

> **"***I think some of the best comedians are the ones that make you think about things that you don't normally think about and realise the absurdity of it. That light bulb goes off and causes you to laugh or at least smile or nod your head"* (Fred, Volunteer Member, Office).

> *"It stays in my head for months, because it is so true…. it is like someone else is defining reality as they see it; as they choose to grasp it and that is a very small reality, or a very personal reality that can be very helpful, because you may agree with them or you might think they are "off" about that and figure it through. Maybe you laughed at the time, but later you decide "I do not really think that"* (Mandy, Volunteer Member, Office).

As James explains, once he had felt influenced by humour, the meanings and perspectives contained in what had made him laugh often became integral to his own viewpoint going forward:

> *"It is holding up a mirror and is quite clever, because it is thinking about the things you think about in new ways. It has a novelty and the cleverness of how somebody delivers something; the way they hold up and show you something funny about your circumstances and the day-to-day, then becomes an association"* (James, Volunteer Trainer, Orientations).

For interviewees, the things that others found funny often resonated in a way that more serious perspectives did not, due to the complicity inherent in their own laughter (De Sousa, 1987: 290):

> *"By talking about world events in the way that he [Jon Stewart on The Daily Show] does, you are learning about it, but you are also laughing at it and that is how he reaches so many people, because a lot of people identify with his type of humour…. that is powerful, when you are communicating information that way"* (Rachel, Full Time Coordinator).

Here, members construct humour as reflection points or "reality contacts" (Roberts and Johnson, 1957) that feed personal commentaries and mediate outlooks:

> ***"****I am more introspective than that, so if a joke has been made about something that I do not identify with yet, I take that commentary, because humour can be personal commentary…. I might roll with it and respond to that humour with more humour and keep it going. I am generally good spirited, so I normally laugh either way, but I might not be able to continue that joke myself, if I were feeling particularly defensive. I might be able to acknowledge it and find it funny, but keep my mouth shut, because it is like "I just need to think about that one"* (Brenda, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

> *"A joke is so important, because you are always looking for information. You are mining the situation all the time, even if it is not on purpose, you are always paying attention, because it is exciting. You are reading different levels or trying on different interpretations in order to find the place where that thing is funny. So it is an active participation, even as a listener"* (Emily, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

As Sid reveals, when a member made others laugh, it often became a hook for future humour and laughter, so that perspectives were disciplined in that moment:

> *"When you have something funny, a good humourist holds on to it and waits until later and then it becomes a "call back" and by referencing it again, you get more laughs from that"* (Sid, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

As the following perspectives reveal, the paradoxes, incongruity and multiple perspectives that fostered humour created a picture of the self as mutable, easily influenced, contextual and relational (Scott, Corman and Chaney, 1998: 308):

> *"I feel like it [humour] changes our attitudes, our sense of what is important. It doesn't change our sense of reality, but it changes how we approach reality in some way"* (Leo, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

> *"It is like a different prism or angle on things you are afraid of; or concerned about; that excite you and those things that you believe are important. All these things are bound up in humour and in some way, what you find funny reflects those things. When you find commonalities that are amusing and funny, it is really interesting just how powerful that can be"* (Michael, Volunteer Member, Shopping).

Members constructed humour as a dynamic and influential medium through which they created and maintained perspectives. Humour changed the emotional tone and acted as a discrete form of discipline within relationships (Fineman and Gabriel, 1996: 23).

6.8 Resistance

This section examines how members constructed humour as a way to resist organizational texts and dominant discourses. Members talked about the ways in which humour and laughter allowed them to interact reflexively with others, acting as an important resource to push back and retain discrete perspectives. Members were aware that the things they found funny often connected them to other members, so that shared laughter and camaraderie felt enabling (Billig, 2005: 46): *"....it [sharing laughter] is a way of communicating we are all on the same page…. it feels a little bit like resistance or solidarity building, just coordinating our approach or attitude"* (Leo, Volunteer Member, Food Processing). When a member poked fun at the organisation, structures or the people who made up the environment, it allowed them to create some distance, without isolating themselves, because laughter provided a sense of coherence and mutuality (Curco, 1996: 1). Interviewees constructed humour and laughter as a way to constitute their sense of individuality; a means of interacting with relations of power on their own terms (Albert, Ashforth and Dutton, 2000: 13):

> *"I have a hard time sometimes gate keeping my unique perceptions of reality which manifest in comedic exclamations* (Tony, Volunteer Member, Office).

> ***"****It's like you are reasserting yourself against the situation; like it's not such an overwhelming situation that I can't speak out against it. Not that humour is activism, but it is a little moment of independence, a little moment of going against the grain; it's got to be going against the grain or have the surprising twist or be undercutting in order to be funny and so it is inherently giving you some independence"* (Charles, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

Informants talked about using humour to reflexively twist and reconstruct discourses, *"tweaking at the structure of the thing"* (Sally, Volunteer Member, Shopping). A form of communication that granted a degree of autonomy:

> *"It gives me the freedom to say what I want and if you do it in an appropriate social way, then you are rewarded for that"* (Sally, Volunteer Member, Shopping).

The incongruity inherent in wit and jocularity is often a defence mechanism that informs our engagement with others (Freud, 1928). Here, Emma constructs humour as a playful and enjoyable way to constitute her contradictory nature:

> *"It [humour] is often a defence mechanism, but it is a really nice one that I enjoy quite a bit [laughs]* (Emma, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

For Tom, humour constituted the space to navigate the community as individual, but not apart, less touched by those that he did not identify with:

> *"You are changing internally how you feel about it and that is a big change; that is the biggest change. You cannot change other people, but you can change how you react to other people; you do not have to be affected by them or have them define you* (Tom, Volunteer Squad Leader, Shopping).

As Michael explains, humour allows him to reflexively constitute his own perspectives, by seeing how others engage with his ideas, simultaneously strengthening or weakening his positions depending on the reaction of others:

> *"It is a way for people to express a common view; a common worldview of what their attitude is toward anything by throwing out jokes to see if they land or not"* (Michael, Volunteer Member, Shopping).

Humour can empower individuals in ways that allow them to retain a strong sense of self through resistance, inspired by the laughter of others (Scott, 1990: 45) and many interviewees constructed humour as a struggle for meaning:

> **"***You can deconstruct things with one sentence and totally undermine anything with a little bit of humour and sometimes that is really important"* (Sally, Volunteer Member, Shopping).

As Sid exemplifies, many interviewees constructed humour as a contact point with others that allowed them to feel less constrained by dominant social views:

> *"Humour allows you to touch on subjects that would be taboo or considered pretentious, lofty or even offensive and you can go right in and drive straight into the middle of it. If you use humour and turn it with humour, you are communicating on a lot of levels to your co-workers"* (Sid, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

Here, Sid talks about how the incongruity within humour affords a veneer that cloaks exact meaning, making interactions more interesting, connections more rewarding and discrete ideas more complex (cf. Stromberg and Karlsson, 2009: 633):

> *"It also gives you a little out; there is a little door at bottom of the chicken coup to escape, if it's not working; maybe it's not what you decide; maybe you didn't like revealing something. It gives you a lot of control; it gives you a lot to work with within a joke"* (Sid, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

As the following comments exemplify, members constructed humour as a vehicle that helped create some distance from their own views and understandings. The ambiguity in humour provided a "vanishing point", when their viewpoints appeared to stand outside of others' positions:

> *"Humour is a device to feel things out; where you can fall back and you really didn't risk much"* (Barry, Full Time Coordinator).

> *"You can make a joke about something and if a person in a position of authority is troubled, you can always argue that you were just making a joke and why did you take it so seriously? When you make a statement that is devoid of humour, you are extensively making an argument; if you are making a joke, it is a way of expressing yourself and pushing back, without being as clear"* (Michael, Volunteer Member, Shopping).

Humour constituted discursive practices that countered and twisted dominant discourses, allowing members to feel less affected (Hatch and Ehrlich, 1993: 524). Here, interviewees talk about humour as a natural way to interact with other people at a distance:

> *"Humour caters to that part of us that does not want to change… It is comforting in a way, because it provides insulation"* (Hattie, Volunteer Member, Office).

> *"You have to disarm this thing that people do to you, which is to constrain you, so that you feel like you cannot say anything after a while…. in my mind I will make fun of that person or use humour to talk about that situation later on, because to me, the over application of this "PC" thing is more harmful than just letting people be people"* (Jackie, Full Time General Coordinator).

Interviewees constructed humour as a natural defence mechanism that acted as a barrier to the full assimilation of discourses: *"….even if I use humour, it doesn't insulate me; it is like cotton candy rather than concrete, it still seeps in a little bit, even if I can keep most of it at bay"* (Sally, Volunteer Member, Shopping). Informants talked about how humour changed the tone, reinterpreted meanings and strengthened positions:

> *"I don't relate to them and that strengthens my sense of self; rather than weaken my position, it forces you to pull the barriers up tighter* (Charles, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

> *"You just have to take it all in stride, and only let the big things penetrate, in a way that really gets to you. I just kind of choke off the rest, chuckle at the whole thing"* (Fred, Volunteer Member, Office).

Humour was constructed by participants as a resource to push back and maintain discrete outlooks, bolstered by the reactions of others. Humour allowed members to *"essentially re-frame and hold a mirror up…. so they can see the ridiculousness or the absurdity through my goofy glasses"* (Tony, Volunteer Member, Office), providing a degree of control and self-determination (Martin, 2007: 113).

6.9 The United States and Socialism

These findings build on the previous section, by examining how members mobilised dominant discourses from wider society to construct resistance and ambivalence at the Coop (Collinson, 1992: 237). The foundation and history of the Coop was embedded in *"a form of socialism that is amenable to existing values and ideas"* (Restakis, 2010: 50). As a result, many dominant discourses at the Coop overlapped with those in wider society. However, the word "socialism" is an emotive word in the United States and this was evident in the views of local media, who often used humour to critique the organization: *"….the Coop is worse than socialism…. because at least in a socialist country, if you know the right people, you can get out of it"* (New York Times: At a Food Coop, a Discordant Thought: Nannies Covering Shifts, Feb, 2011). This focus on "socialism" led to an obvious association with communism: *"….the largest member-owned and operated coop in the country, something between an earthy-crunchy health food haven and a Soviet-style re-education camp"* (Chow.com: Won't Work for Food, Sep, 2006). Many of the members I spoke to found these humorous comments funny and they became part of the discourses that circulated the organization. Most members appropriated, incorporated and maintained outlooks that were fundamental to being an organizational insider (Casey, 1999: 170), but it was easy to joke about "socialism":

> *"Things evolve on their own… it [socialism] is an easy thing to make fun of, an easy thing to laugh at and it is something everybody can do, it is a good opener in conversations, it's an easy target, it's just easy and something that is easy is something that people do"* (Paul, Volunteer Member, Office).

Dominant discourses on "socialism" in wider society influenced perspectives within the organization, but this power in humour was *"diffuse rather than concentrated, embodied and enacted rather than possessed, discursive rather than purely coercive"* (Gaventa 2003: 1). This was reflected in the way members spoke about their ambivalence towards the organization. Here, Paul talks about how he agrees with the organization's mission and cause, but with a wry laugh and a deliberate sense of disconnect:

> *"Part of it is the very nature of the Coop; everybody there works; everybody does the same; everybody shares; does their part and gets the same benefit. I think that is great and I am an admirer of that philosophy. It fits my socialist view of things; it is beautiful, helpful and a good thing, but the names that they use are funny and sometimes the attitude goes a little too far"* (Paul, Volunteer Member, Office).

As Sarah exemplifies, rather than an overt act of resistance, humour provided alternative discourses (Sewell, 1992: 4) that became part of the fabric of the organization and in-turn shaped perspectives and understandings:

> *"Humour is a form of idiosyncratic free speech. Whereas in truly communist cultures, you cannot do that and the heavies, the rigid people are to be feared. They hold a real power even if it is skewed power. At the Coop those people want to hold power, but they are a nuisance. They could really make trouble for you, but by joking aloud you are asserting the fact that their sense of power is inflated. It is really out of place, because we are not in a communist country and the Coop is only socialistic in nature. America is democratic, so the humour (when you think about it and I never thought about this) reinforces free will"* (Sarah, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

Once members associated "socialism" with "communism", the organization became an easy target for jokes and stories that focused on stereotypes, such as bureaucracy, inefficiency, authoritarianism, "big brother" etc., as illustrated by the following story:

> ***"****I went for my "initiation", the introduction where they tell you how the Coop works. I found the names they use hilarious. "Squad leader" is quite "Communist" sounding and so that is funny. "Orientation", that was the word! I went to my orientation; it sounds like you are going to some camp somewhere in the Soviet Union. I don't know if those names were done ironically or seriously? I think they are pretty funny". "They were giving a talk on what work positions*

you might want to take and what your job is going to be. They gave us these options, you can do this, or you can do that, or whatever. So I went and talked to some guy, who was one of the permanent employees and I said "nice to meet you, I just want you to know that I am a lawyer and I have been practicing for 25 years". "I understand the non-profit laws pretty well and I also do some corporate work. Maybe you have some legal work? I get paid a lot for doing this, but obviously, I will be happy to volunteer my time. Put me to use. Let me do some of this stuff. I am flexible and I just want to be helpful". He looked at me and said "why don't you sign up for either floor sweeping or counting vitamins?" [Laughs] Just like that. That is a true story. It was not meant offensively. It was just that they had no interest. It was kind of funny. So I went and took my first job doing vitamin inventory. It was no problem, but that is just kind of the attitude" (Paul, Volunteer Member, Office).

Stories about the PA allowed discourse to manifest in ways that facilitated self-surveillance (Knights and Willmott, 1989). Here, Charles compares the store's PA system to "Big Brother" and constructs humour as a subtle device that allows members to relate and form resistance:

"It is funny to keep using the "Russian Communist" metaphors. You joke about the rules, but you also feel like you cannot joke "too much" about them, because "somebody" might be listening. I drank a drinkable yogurt in line, because I was shopping and starving one day and there was an announcement over the loudspeaker thirty seconds later, "the reason we do not eat food in the Coop, is because it is unsanitary and it puts us all at risk" [laughs]. There is always this sense, that inhibits, that makes it feel more like a secret subculture of jokes, rather than a thing you can be open about" (Charles, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

As interviewees said, once they had joked and laughed about aspects of the Coop, it was easy to feel like an interloper in their own organization: *"Humour is more compelling.... so you attach yourself to the reality in humour, rather than that other reality"* (Sally, Volunteer Member, Shopping). Humour that targeted socialism constituted wider outlooks that allowed members to feel less touched by the discourses that governed the organization:

> *"It is funny, when you think about it. I do not know what the genesis of all these words were, but they really say something. How about this one, "you are in bad standing" [laughs]; "you are in evil standing" [laughs]; [mock phone call] "I don't know what the word is, but I am sorry, I missed a shift because I had to take my child to the hospital", [reply] "sorry, but you are in "bad standing" [laughs] and you are not allowed to come and shop here"* (Paul, Volunteer Member, Office).

> *"You are on alert! It is like some kind of "terrorist alert", you are a bad person. I understand and get the fact that you need to have tools; we need to make sure that people do their job, but the words that are used have connotations. They could be using other words"* (Paul, Volunteer Member, Office).

Humour and laughter were influential forces within relations of power, allowing members to construct a sense of distance from values that contradicted alternative positions found in wider society, "*leaving behind a laugh and perhaps the idea of a private way out"* (Hochschild, 1983: 23).

6.10 Conclusion

This chapter examined the various ways members' mobilised the "power in" humour through the maintenance of discourses (Deetz, 1992). Humour was a mode of expression that influenced how members voiced opinions and constructed relationships, shaping how participants came to comprehend themselves in relation to others and influencing how dominant discourses were mobilised. Members talked about humour and laughter as forms of communication that helped shape their understandings. While relations of power function to discipline perspectives, members talked about how divergent discourses competed for space within the organization and how this fostered a sense of incongruity that connected members seeking to relate with one another (cf. Westwood and Johnston, 2011). Humour allowed members to resist officially sanctioned organizational texts through the mobilisation of discourses that permeated wider society, demonstrating that relations of power are never static and that shared meanings are often arrived at through alternative tropes and rhetoric, influencing the construction of dominant discourses (Oswick, Putnam and Keenoy, 2004).

Humour and laughter acted as sensemaking devices to provide *"an oblique phenomenology"* on organizational life (Critchley, 2007: 30), through which members sought to discipline meanings and privilege certain beliefs (Foucault, 1977: 27). This was a discrete process, often adding emphasis to perspectives and was for many members, key to comprehending their social environment in relation to others (Humphreys *et al.*, 2003: 6). This chapter highlighted how humour impacted the organization, acting as a sensemaking device for the creation, maintenance and modification of dominant discourses. Members constructed humour and laughter as mutual and influential, so that the things members found funny in concert with others came to represent dominant perspectives, creating and maintaining relations of power (Foucault, 1994). This "power in" humour provided a commentary on organizational life and participants talked about how they mobilised humour to connect with others and understand their surroundings (Sluss and Ashforth, 2007). This theme is examined in more detail in the following chapter, where members speak about the ways in which humour helps them identify with others and maintain discrete understandings and perspectives, built around life stories, relationships and wider sources of inspiration from outside the organization (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002).

7. Humour and Identity

7.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on how members construct humour as a vital aspect of their identity and a key to relating to others (Fineman and Gabriel, 1996). Humour acts as a resource that members utilise to connect and bond with other likeminded individuals (Holmes, 2006). Participants speak about the ways humour connects meanings and understandings, because within the things people find funny, are shared interpretations and perspectives that signal a degree of commonality, "*....if you and I share certain assumptions and certain perceptions of things, then that means we are alike"* (Paul, Volunteer Member, Office). Members speak about humour becoming integral to how they comprehend themselves as organizational members. Dominant discourses allow members to connect through shared frames of reference (Goffman, 1974) and provide a contact point for irony to act as an identity resource (Holmes and Marra, 2002). Members talk also demonstrates how humour allows discrete perspectives to supersede more structured concepts, so that relations of power are never static (Weick, 1995). Members speak about how they have constructed their own sense of humour through life experiences and how this allows them to connect with others dynamically to shape interactions.

The chapter demonstrates how members construct identities reflexively through signal emotions, relationships and discrete forms of communication while making sense of their environment (Fineman, 2000). The initial section (7.2) examines how the dominant discourse of ownership allowed members to maintain discrete perspectives. Participants talk about humour acting as a resource that allows them to take ownership over their surroundings. The following section (7.3) explores how members construct humour as a personal narrative that allows them to establish their individuality. Members talk about utilising humour to foster and strengthen discrete perspectives in concert with other members, by bringing their personality to bear in ways that others relate to. Section (7.4) explores how members draw on multiple perspectives and social milieu to construct humour that allows them to connect and relate with others through multifaceted identities. Members talk about drawing on different aspects of their personality and wider experiences to foster humour that allows them to relate with others distinctively and reflexively. This theme is expanded in section (7.5), which examines how members construct their sense of humour as an important maturation process that shapes how they present themselves. Members talk about the ways their sense of humour represents a vital part of their identity, allowing them to actively participate in the perspectives of others.

Section (7.6) explores members' talk of feeling restricted when they cannot utilise their sense of humour. Members speak about feeling less constrained and more "open" when they are able to engage others humorously and speak about humour being an important signal that their own views and understandings coalesce with others. Section (7.7) explores how humour allows members to engage with discrete viewpoints in ways that shape identity construction. Members talk about the suddenness with which humour can align perspectives, allowing individuals to reflexively engage new ways of thinking. The final section examines how members construct humour as a form of connection that allows them to relate with others. Section (7.8) explores how members construct humour as a form of social connection, which allows them comprehend when their own views are shared by others. Members talk about humour being a quick and easy way to build rapport and discuss being able to connect with others through the subtle accord found in ironic eye contact. Members discuss how these social connections allow them to form deeper relationships with others. Participants talk about forming associations through humour and discuss how this provides opportunities to develop and maintain identities through relationships founded on mutual perspectives and outlooks.

This chapter draws on my engagement with the literature on identity construction (Foucault, 1988; Giddens, 1991; Barker, 1998) and focuses on how individuals use the discursive resources at their disposal to foster a sense of connection with others. Members talk about humour being central to their own identity and discuss how they mobilise humour in order to present themselves more fully and in so doing, relate with others, allowing humour to become an influential resource in the construction of identity. Members speak about connecting with others, sharing perspectives that are constituted through dominant discourses (Foucault, 1988). Humour allows views and outlooks to coalesce in ways that lead to shared sentiments; the responses of others providing a sense of affirmation that supports identity construction in relations to the Other (Sluss and Ashford, 2007).

7.2 Ownership

This section examines how members constructed humour and laughter as a form of ownership over the intangible (cf. Van Dyne and Pierce, 2004), to create shared interpretations of dominant discourses that helped shape identities (Starkey and McKinlay, 1998: 231). The Coop was an organization where the founding principle of joint ownership was etched into the collective conscious and most interviewees expressed a sense of ownership, reflecting organizational texts and dominant discourses that provided a constant reminder that the Coop was "ours": *"When you walk into a traditional supermarket, you are walking into someone else's store. When you walk into the Park Slope Food Coop, you are walking into your own store"* (Coop Membership Manual). As Ellie exemplifies, all members were influenced by the heritage of the Coop and by the dominant discourses that provided a cohesive organizational identity (Foucault, 1991):

> *"The Coop has a reputation and feels so elite in many ways, even though it is supposed to be an accessible and democratic organization, that it strengthens what it means to feel part of it"* (Ellie, Volunteer Member, Office).

Members who attended General Meetings were able to realise a tangible sense of ownership, because their vote directly shaped the organization: *"I really see that more clearly, because it is really where members are running the show and we are there to try to answer questions. It is not our show at those meetings and it is something that I really try to remember"* (Rachel, Full Time Coordinator). However, as one interviewee admitted, *"I haven't gone to a General Meeting since the first one I went to when I first joined; most of us do not take our ownership role seriously"* (Joan, Volunteer Member, Food Processing). Most members did not attend these meetings and so for many interviewees, ownership was constructed as subjective, intangible and personal (Pierce, Kostova and Dirks, 2003). As James explains:

> *"It [humour] is belonging. If you can actually make a joke about something, it means you are in and you know it well enough.... it is how you own that moment"* (James, Volunteer Trainer, Orientations).

Rather than constituting a sense of control over the organization itself, many interviewees preferred to construct ownership as a degree of autonomy and freedom to say what the organization was, what it should be and what views were integral to that social space (cf. Avey, Avolio, Crossley and Luthans, 2009). As Claire exemplifies, this sense of ownership over the intangible allowed interviewees to constitute humour and laughter in ways that influenced identities:

> *"If you are there doing your work, there is a sense that you do have an ownership over the place. There is the sense that you have earned it and you have earned the right to make a joke about it"* (Claire, Volunteer Member, Office).

Ownership meant that newer members did not need to defer to others: *"....maybe you feel more ownership the longer that you are there, probably because you have supported it for a longer time, but I have an equal share [laughs]"* (Jimmy, Volunteer Member, Receiving). As Karen and Emma illustrate, how a member interpreted ownership shaped their relationship to the organization and other members:

> *"There are so many levels of that within the organization…. We are all members, we are all workers, all owners…. we all own it together, but some people have greater ownership of the Coop…. I guess it is that dividing line sometimes"* (Karen, Volunteer Member, Office).

> *"The Coop is not separate from us, the way other institutions are. We "are the Coop", to a certain extent, although we certainly feel like there are people "more in charge" than we are as individuals. It is an institution that is trying to reproduce itself, but the informal culture is so dynamic; it changes; it is completely fluid. I can see a certain set of values that do reproduce themselves, but there is also a great deal of diffuseness to the culture"* (Emma, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

Ownership became a discursive resource in the creation and maintenance of identities and fostered humour that shaped perspectives and disturbed once dominant discourses (Pierce, Kostova and Dirks, 2003: 86):

> *"That is one of those archetypes, the older member who is a bit rigid and rule based, because they were there when the rules were being formed and now they see new people come in and ignore those rules.... but theirs is not the dominant culture anymore, even though they helped define what the Coop has become, they are now the outsiders"* (Barry, Full Time Coordinator).

As Gaynor exemplifies, when a member joked and laughed with others as owner, it fostered mutual perceptions and understandings that allowed members to take possession of their surroundings in concert with others:

> *"To be able to see the comedy inside of it; to joke about the Coop from a place of ownership…. So that even if we are teasing or mocking the Coop in some way, we are all dedicated to it and there doing it, with our little hairnets on. There is a sense that, we are "all together" in this kookiness"* (Gaynor, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

Once a member came to think of the Coop as "ours", it provided a framework for comfort, security and pleasure (Van Dyne and Pierce, 2004: 442). As Karen explains, the ideas and perspectives present in humour allowed members to take ownership of their environment in ways that shaped and were shaped in turn by dominant discourses governing cooperation, mutuality and community (Foucault, 1988: 18):

> *"To sort of take ownership of a lifestyle, an experience and of places; people really like being members of the Coop…. people buy into it culturally…. laughter really feeds the joy of being a part of that"* (Karen, Volunteer Member, Office).

Here, Chris talks about ownership providing a degree of freedom to joke about the organization, opening up space for members to construct themselves as simultaneously part of and apart from the community:

> *"….it [joking about the Coop] is an acknowledgement that I am part of this organization, but I am also outside of this organization"* (Chris, Volunteer Member, Shopping).

Humour provided an important medium to present a members sense of ownership in an idiosyncratic way, by providing a sense of command within social situations (Pierce, O'Driscoll and Coghlan, 2004). How a member interpreted their own sense of ownership was linked to how they related to others and by how effectively they interacted within various organizational settings, so that ownership implied *"symbolic expressions of the self that show core values or individuality" (Van Dyne and Pierce, 2004: 443),* as Jimmy exemplifies:

> *"When you are, like I was, on the first shift, unsure of myself and wanting to please [laughs].... I didn't show who I was, in the same way that I do now through humour. You are able to demonstrate who you are"* (Jimmy, Volunteer Member, Receiving).

As Karen's remarks illustrate, a member's sense of ownership over the tangible, over personal interactions, over the subjective were caught in a mutual embrace between the social and individual; a *"dual creation; part attitude, part object; part in the mind, part real"* (Etzioni, 1991: 466). Humour and laughter, imbued with this narrative, influenced how member formulated identities in relation to others:

> *"The tension of that desire to dis the Coop, but not dismiss it, because it is so powerful in our experience of living here"* (Karen, Volunteer Member, Office).

> *"The thing about ownership, is with that there are certain entitlements, but if you can't laugh at the Coop and find humour in some of the aspects, without turning it nasty or using more jabbing laughter, where you are poking fun at it, versus laughing at yourself within that whole structure, then I don't think humour serves you in a way that it feeds you"* (Karen, Volunteer Member, Office).

The word "our" established discourses that constructed the Coop as part of a member's identity and provided a platform for members to share this relationship with others (cf. Pierce, et al., 2003). Joking about members who took things too seriously provided the opportunity to feel a strong sense of ownership, without the need to "buy-in" fully: *"The totality of my possessions reflects the totality of my being.... I am what I have.... what is mine is myself'* (Sartre, 1969, quoted in Van Dyne and Pierce, 2004: 441). Humour provided a vehicle for members to take ownership over the intangible, shaping discourses and identity construction.

7.3 Individuality

This section examines the various ways that members constructed a sense of humour as an important way of expressing individuality: *"....it is classic; the kids that fell outside in school developed a sharper sense of humour to connect. Maybe they have something about them that is not the norm or fashionable, so they observe more and become funny and that is their key"* (Sid, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing). Humour embraces the tension between a need for structure and individuality and acted as a vehicle for members to put their structural capacities to use in order to find gaps for their own perspectives (Gabriel, 1995: 484): *"That feeling of rebellion actually makes us feel that we belong, because the entire body of members feels a little bit the same…. It is an ego thing, "don't tell me what to do, I will do the right thing, but I am going to do it with a sense of humour. If you just feel like you are following the rules the whole time, then you start to feel a bit like a robot, so it gives people a sense that they are real people; we are individuals"* (Cathy, Volunteer Member, Food Processing). When other members found an individual's perspectives funny, it enabled that individual to push back slightly, their sense of individuality affirmed, not through overt rebellion, but by enacting reflexively with dominant discourses in ways that felt integral to their identity (Mumby and Clair, 1997: 181):

> *"We replicate experiences, so that we can understand them and ourselves better, within these closed environments. We are constantly testing hypotheses and how far we can push the boundary before we will be stopped. I think there is something very gratifying about pushing the boundaries"* (Karen, Volunteer Member, Office).

Here, Jackie constructs humour as key to creating and sustaining mutual relationships (Wenger, 1998: 125), because it allows someone to reveal them self in a way that provides a glimpse of their individuality:

> *"When you laugh with someone, it is a way of giving recognition to some unique quality in them and what they are saying"* (Jackie, Full Time General Coordinator).

For many interviewees, how others responded to their humour revealed important clues about their audience, so that humour and mirth became an important sign that allowed members to get a feel for how others perceived them and who they connected with and why (Goffman, 1959: 14): *"....if it is something that people see in you and you can laugh at yourself too; if it*

is your little tick; or something about "your way" in the world; how other people see you. It means they see something about you; they are noticing something charming" (Gaynor, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing). "Are they like me"? "Do I find them engaging"? "What is it that makes them different"? "Have I considered that perspective"? Do they "kill me"[39]? *"What is the thing that has take-up"?* (James, Volunteer Member, Orientations). How someone joked, what they found funny and who they believed they could joke with are all became important clues to comprehend that person's views in relation to others (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000: 39), as Michael and Sid illustrate:

> *"It [humour] is a way of expressing values, points of view, perspectives and ideas. You are basically making statements in humour all the time, about what you think is important; what you think is not important"* (Michael, Volunteer Member, Shopping).

> *"You kind of know through humour, where you can and where you can't go. It gives you a sign pulse to use as a guide for this person and if someone is sensitive to something, you alter your view to find the common thread, because people are going to search subconsciously for the common ground, but are also really interested in the differences"* (Sid, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

Here, Tony constructs humour as a way to break free of more structured ways of thinking, his sense of humour representing his sense of individuality in relation to the Other (Billig, 2005: 12):

> *"I have a hard time sometimes gate keeping my unique perceptions of reality which manifest in comedic exclamations* (Tony, Volunteer Member, Office).

Here, Sally talks about her sense of humour as a personal narrative that is constrained by dominant discourses, but not confined:

> *"It is very much about identity; when people say I am really funny, I am bolstered by it. I like it when people laugh at my jokes, because I feel good and it makes me feel like an individual"* (Sally, Volunteer Member, Shopping).

39 *"He's a very sensitive boy. He's really never been a terribly good mixer with other boys. Perhaps he takes things a little more seriously than he should at his age". Sensitive. That killed me. That guy Morrow was about as sensitive as a goddam toilet seat"* (Salinger, Catcher in the Rye: 30).

> *"I have always thought of myself as a funny person; someone who could "see" humour and laugh most of the time; I love jokes, I love that, because it is the best and I surround myself with people who are super funny; I like to partner up with people who are super funny; I identified with funny people early on. I do not know if I did that because I had a strong character or if that helped me have a stronger character, but it made me feel stronger; it made me feel stronger than those that did not have a sense of humour. There is a social hierarchy and I was trying to find my place; I got enough clues, that being funny made you an individual and being an individual meant you were strong"* (Sally, Volunteer Member, Shopping).

Members constructed humour as an important resource to push back and maintain some level of individuality, by bringing their personality to bear in ways that others related to (Wenger, 1998: 126): *"....it [humour] can make things less threatening and easier to understand, easier to align with your values…. it is interpretation, you want things to match what you believe"* (Alex, Volunteer Member, Food Processing). Interviewees often constructed humour as vital to their sense of individuality, because it allowed them to communicate alternative perspectives that they felt were integral to their identity, allowing other aspects of their life history, personality and character to rise to the surface (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002).

7.4 Humour Reflects Multiple Identities

This section examines how members often constructed their sense of humour as a narrative that constituted a wide range of sources of inspiration. Members talked about how they drew on multiple perspectives, various social milieu and alternative conceptions to foster humour and how these narratives allowed them to fluidly connect with others (Webb, 2006: 18). Interviewees constructed humour as central to authoring their "real" perceptions and their "true" identity in social situations, even if that was in a limited capacity (Alvesson and Willmott, 2004: 12). Humour was a medium through which members demonstrated discrete traits and perspectives, without the need to be iconoclast or rebellious, because their views and interpretations connected them to others through shared laughter (Wenger, 1998: 126). For example, many interviewees discussed how they gravitated to others who took their membership and the organization less seriously and this allowed people to bring in outlooks and principles from outside of the confines of the organization and in so doing show more of their alternative selves (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002: 622):

> *"I think people use humour, especially at the Coop, as a means of connecting. Even when you are a member and somebody else isn't, you can laugh at the rules of the Coop or the supposed rules of the Coop (that do not exist) across that divide of membership. If you can laugh at it, then that says that you are one of these people who does not take it too seriously"* (Karen, Volunteer Member, Office).

As Karen exemplifies, members were often quick to point out that they were not simply one kind of individual and did not simply have one identity. Rather, their views were fluid and humour allowed them to convey multiple perspectives in the process of making others laugh:

> ***"****It is an important part of who I am and in terms of how it defines me, I am a different kind of funny with different people; I am the cool kid or witty or way too smart or easy going. I use humour in different ways and it has a great deal of value; one of my values is to always convey my humour"* (Karen, Volunteer Member, Office).

As Susie explains, humour constituted alternative views and understandings that were central to her character and personality:

> *"It [humour] is a reinforcement of that adolescent or child, in that "I am still many parts, I am not just this one piece"* (Susie, Volunteer Member, Office).

Interviewees constructed humour that targeted members being too rigid or serious as an inclusive form of discourse that allowed individuals to communicate alternative views and understandings (Davis, 1993: 312): *"The majority of us don't want to be identified as those people. Making fun of them sets us apart, "I am not one of those people that take things so seriously"; you are differentiating yourself from them"* (Sally, Volunteer Member, Shopping). Rather than yielding to conformity, members co-opted and utilised discourses to create an environment where revealing alternative identities became a vital way to connect (Albert, Ashforth and Dutton, 2000: 14). Here interviewees construct humour as a form of discourse that draws attention to whether something is important enough to care deeply about:

> *"Joking about it is a way to check ourselves against it, by acknowledging that we have these rules and we have them for a reason, but let's not take ourselves or these things so seriously"* (James, Volunteer Member, Orientations).

> **"***I am from that world and I am so much a part of that world, but it is easy to have a few chuckles at others who I perceive as taking it a little bit too seriously"* (Paul, Volunteer Member, Office).

> *"We all want to be pictured and portrayed as "that person who can have fun" and that person is going to have a sense of humour. You do not want to be looked upon as the person who is strictly by the book; who doesn't laugh and doesn't find anything funny…. that's the universal thing"* (Fred, Volunteer Member, Office).

Once members began to connect through alternative identities, it fostered a dynamic environment, where it was comfortable to relate in ways that connected subtle differences, alternative perspectives and unique life histories (Fineman, 2006: 283). Humour and laughter became extremely important discourses in the formation of identities, because it was how members connected to those around them in ways that allowed them to demonstrate they were not simply organizational members, who thought and felt a certain way, as Charles exemplifies:

> *"Humour is often a context shift. It is funny because you are combining ideas in a different way or seeing it from another point of view. Those are basic types of joke and it does force you to step out of the exact, immediate situation we are in and look at it with one level of distance…. it is also good at making the fact that we are Coop members a very small part of our identities; being able to admit that we are all in this situation, but we are also just people"* (Charles, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

Members talked about humour allowing them to fashion multifaceted identities that influenced how they connected and related to others (Giddens, 1991: 5), constructing humour as a fluid and natural medium for the transmission of views and understandings, founded on personal histories, experiences and relationships (Albert, Ashforth and Dutton, 2000: 14). While structured in some way, humour also constituted informants' desires for agency and reflected beyond the confines of their immediate situations, buoyed by an intrinsic knowledge of people and how to make others laugh (Holmes, 2000: 163).

7.5 Sense of Humour

This section examines how members constructed their sense of humour as an important maturation process that effected how they presented themselves in relation to others, *"....this more mature sense of self-acceptance; self-control; this is my identity and this is what I am choosing to be"* (Hattie, Volunteer Member, Office). Interviewees talked about their sense of humour as an on-going achievement, reflecting their life history, an active project that shaped their identity (Giddens, 1991: 5): *"I feel like I have actually had to get to know my sense of humour and how it comes across to other people, just me personally, from how I have been raised; who has been raising me; what I have taken from them; what I have taken from the world around me; I have had to fine tune my own sense of humour"* (Brenda, Volunteer Member, Food Processing). An ability to make others laugh and connect with members through humour shaped and defined an individual's distinctiveness (Martin, 1998: 4). As the following comments exemplify, interviewees constructed their sense of humour as integral to their identity, shaping and shading their perceptions and helping to define their interactions:

> *"It is more of attitude, where humour and satire help us maintain perspective. That can easily be lost…. this is a fun environment for us, because it is social and there are a lot of people, so you use humour to lubricate the parts"* (Jon, Volunteer Squad Leader, Shopping).

> *"I just laugh at everything; it is not necessarily laughing out loud, but I am always amused by people and myself. I am half in the experience, while part of me is standing outside watching"* (Michael, Volunteer Member, Shopping).

As Sandra illustrates, the act of making others laugh requires practice and introspection, so that a sense of humour enacts those efforts, often materialising without the need to think (Fox, 2005: 62):

> *"It is a natural inclination. I don't think I always had it though. I was one of those people when I was younger, maybe we all are, I wouldn't quite get the joke; so then I worked at it. I noticed that when you get the joke and you'd make a joke, then it kind of brings people together and you start making friends; you start making more connections that way. So I don't know if it was initially natural, but I find it comes very easily, especially if there is somebody else with a quick sense of humour. He or she will say something and I don't know what happens; it just comes into my head and I shoot it back. I have a line; I have a comeback;*

sometimes I have to think about it, but let's say at least 75% of the time, I don't have to think about it anymore, it just comes to me" (Sandra, Full Time Coordinator).

Many interviewees talked about how their sense of humour constituted a vital part of their identity. During our conversations, informants often drew on their experiences to discuss how their sense of humour had become central to their perspectives:

"It [humour] has always been a key part of my identity…. If there is enough time to develop a shared language and a shared set of experiences, I feel I can emerge as a funny person" (Charles, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

As Emily explains, her sense of humour creates richness to how she comprehends dominant discourses and others, providing flexibility and reflexivity to her perspectives (Gabriel, 2008:320). Attuned and in accord, her sense of humour constituted active participation in the perspectives of others:

"You find room for a number of different interpretations, so you have to be tuned in and open to finding out if anything is funny" (Emily, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

A member's sense of humour shaped their interaction with others and with the discourses that shaped organizational realities (Sluss and Ashforth, 2007: 22). As Tony illustrates, his sense of humour is contextual and affects how he connects with others:

"Incongruity can create those comedic moments and that creates a bonding because there are only so many of us that perceive it that same way" (Tony, Volunteer Member, Office).

A member's personal life history effected how they understood them self in relation to others (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002: 622) and as Matt explains, the richer that history and more varied the life settings, the more opportunities to form associations and find the humour in things:

> *"A lot of it has to do with being able to draw on different perspectives. In my case, I am really looking at lots of different places and lots of different milieus. I spent almost a decade in Berlin, working as a DJ, before moving back to New York…. being able to draw on another different set of cultural associations or looking at a thing as an outsider, helps create the potential for humour"* (Matt, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

As Matt illustrates, the way he constructed humour was influenced through his interaction with social media (Rhodes, 2001), connecting him to other members who had experienced similar influences:

> ***"****When I was younger, I would stay up and watch chat shows like Letterman and started to understand the contours of humour…. The stuff I found funny influenced my humour, so that jokes I made myself would all be very contextual as well. It is always a quick reaction to something going on, as opposed to set pieces; taking a phrase from a different angle and drawing peoples' attention to it; commenting on stuff that happens on the fly"* (Matt, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

Here, Paul constructs humour as a signal that outlooks are aligned, so that his ability to constitute humour provided a degree of comfort and relatedness:

> *"Being able to laugh at yourself is an important quality. It shows a certain amount of confidence fitting in with a group and not being too much of an outsider. Laughing at others can show you belong and it is a way of showing we are connected; we know each other; like each other and can laugh at each other. It is a way of forming a connection and shows that connection is deep enough that we are at least able to do that"* (Paul, Volunteer Member, Office).

We are beings *"who fundamentally seek meaning and a sense of life"* (Tiryakian 1968: 76). For many interviewees, this search for meaning was constructed through their sense of humour, a reflection of their identity and how they connected to others. Interviewees constructed their sense of humour as an active project that constituted an influential aspect of their identity. A project rich with humorous relationships and experiences that provided profound ways of comprehending dominant discourses and their identity in relation to others (Giddens, 1991: 5).

7.6 Have You Seen the Real Me?

Members constructed humour as a signal that they felt comfortable expressing their outlooks and opinions. What they found funny and how they communicated that felt integral to their identity: *"....it [humour] is used to communicate a certain sensibility, what people can expect from you"* (Claire, Volunteer Member, Office). Here, Jimmy talks about feeling restricted when he first joined the Coop, so that he felt unable to express himself substantially through humour: *"....it [humour] requires a certain level of confidence in how you fit in, to start that sometimes, although some people will go from a standing start and test parameters, I would probably look around a little bit before I do that"* (Jimmy, Volunteer Member, Receiving). As Laura exemplifies, humour was integral to her identity, allowing her to share an important part of herself with others:

> *"I usually feel people out; on my shift, I know who I can be myself with and who I am really going to have to walk the line with. There are definitely people on the shift who are hard line and who I wouldn't joke around with, but the people who are usually on the shift, the regulars, I can be myself with and we can joke around…. I usually figure out in some unconscious way when it is okay to be myself and just be funny and make the kind of jokes that I would make at home; and then there are times, [hushed voice] "it's not okay" [laughs]* (Laura, Volunteer Member, Childcare).

Here, interviewees talk about their sense of humour being a pervasive influence on how they interact with others and key to injecting their identity into conversations:

> *"It [humour] allows you to share who you really are, who you want to be or who you like to be perceived as"* (Sid, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

> *"It is such an emanation of your personality; it really is, you either do it or you don't"* (Jon, Volunteer Squad Leader, Shopping).

Many interviewees constructed humour as an important way to establish whether others shared their discrete perspective or find out if their own "social truth" was universal: *"To believe your own thought, to believe that what is true for you in your private heart is true for all men, that is genius. Speak your latent conviction, and it shall be universal sense; for always the inmost becomes the outmost and our first thought is rendered back to us"* (Ralph Waldo Emerson, 1841, Essay on Self Reliance). As Sid reveals:

> *"There is a thrill in the risk of putting a joke out there and for yourself, you get something. You throw it out there and you are not sure, you are looking to see if it might be universal, you are fishing for it…. You reveal your innermost thought and it will almost always find universality; the thing that you are sure nobody would think or understand will be the thing that everybody understands, so that in humour, there is a great reward"* (Sid, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

When a member felt restricted by dominant discourses constituted in the views of others, it effected how they presented them self (Goffman, 1959): *"You have to feel it [whether to joke] out a little bit; find out how serious it is, before you feel comfortable just being yourself"* (Katie, Volunteer Member, Shopping). Once comfortable, humour became an important sign, indicating a level of comfort and belonging, a feeling that a member could find mutual ground (Foucault, 1988: 18): *"I did not enjoy it [early on], I did not show who I was in the same way that I do now through humour"* (Jimmy, Volunteer Member, Receiving). Humour carries weight, because it presents the individual as confident; friendly; flexible; intelligent; astute; sharp, etc. (Cann and Calhoun, 2001), so that it became a priority for members to present themselves through their sense of humour, as Milla illustrates:

> ***"****When I first started working at the Coop I had a particular personality and a reputation that went with it, so a lot of people took me to be someone that I did not consider myself to be and that is rigid and hard. As I are started to know more people and feel more comfortable (because it takes me a while to feel comfortable in situations) I started to become more myself, because I guess I was being somebody else. Now I have a different reputation and people have told me that I have changed, but I think that it is mostly because I have felt more comfortable and became more myself and felt able to joke around with people"* (Milla, Full Time Coordinator).

Here, Sid and Matt talk about feeling comfortable enough to joke and laugh freely with other members, allowing them to reflexively engage others and feel less constrained in the process:

> *"I just said what I was thinking; humour gets you out of yourself, so that you don't hold back and because it's funny, you have the possibility to share something"* (Sid, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

> *"That is if I am to be truthful; it [humour] is part of who I am. I do not buy into other peoples' attitudes and problems. I am influenced by them, but I do not necessarily buy into them. I have my own attitude and one the reasons I laugh so much, is that I feel quite confident and comfortable expressing that"* (Matt, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

Members constructed humour and laughter as integral to their identity, so that the ability to interact with other members humorously was an important signal that outlooks and understandings coalesced. When a member joked and laughed with others it signalled a certain level of comfort (Dixon, 2011: 292): *"It [humour] puts you at ease, so that you are more comfortable and more willing to make those bonds with people.... you do not have your guard up as much, so those connections can be made"* (Alex, Volunteer Member, Food Processing). A sense of humour allowed members to connect and influence others through their perspectives (Goffman, 1959: 8).

7.7 Distinct Perspectives

This section examines how members appropriated new frames of reference through the things that made them laugh. Humour is often built on a distinct viewpoint, because it provides a quick change in perspective, an overlooked insight or subtle change in meaning (Eisenhart, 2001: 214). Presenting *"a different version of ourselves, by trying out somebody else's perspective or by taking an ironic distance to our self"* (Emma, Volunteer Member, Food Processing). Humour presents an opportunity to step outside of our singularity and in that moment see things from another perspective (Smith and Berg, 1987). As Leo illustrates, interviewees constructed humour as an influential medium that allowed them to perceive things differently, in ways that connected meanings and influenced their thinking going forward:

"In order to laugh together, we have to see the same thing as funny; we recognise something. There is something that happens, that catches you a little bit by surprise. You do not ordinarily laugh at something that is exactly what you expected to hear, think or feel. The light kind of dawns on both people at the same time and they laugh together, because they are able to appreciate the same thing, the same realisation" (Leo, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

Interviewees often constructed laughter as an important signal that discrete perspectives were shared by others, providing social validation of their views and understandings (Sluss and Ashforth, 2007: 13). As Sid exemplifies:

"It [laughter] is an acceptance and an acknowledgement of "you", but it also makes you think you are not alone in your perceptions" (Sid, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

While interviewees enjoyed the shared perspectives and ideas fostered by humour, they also enjoyed the subtle differences that provided impetus for mirth and laughter (Terrion and Ashforth, 2002: 55):

"Part of humour, is drawing peoples' attention to other things they may not have noticed themselves, by having other vantage points to bring in to it" (Matt, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

"Humour shows what "you" are aware of and what "you" are picking up, which is enormous if other people are not picking up on it and you show them something that they missed" (Sid, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

"It is a key for generating the creativity that you need, because it helps everybody's brain start spinning a little faster" (Matt, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

In order to perceive things from a different angle, an individual requires a certain elasticity of thought (Mulkay, 1988): *"Humour allows for a variety of facets, perspectives and flexibility"* (Sarah, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing). As Emma exemplifies, humour was often stimulated by dominant discourses, opening up space to engage reflexively with relations of power (Giddens, 1991: 5):

> *"It involves being able to see reality from various perspectives. Seeing how something you can take very seriously, looks foolish or ridiculous from a different perspective. So in a way, it is imagining yourself from various perspectives or imagining a hypothetical position from various perspectives and seeing it arbitrarily"* (Emma, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

As Leo illustrates, humour and laughter provided opportunities for members to consider their positions and align discrete outlooks into shared perspectives (Giddens, 1979: 69):

> *"It just seems so straightforward. If we think something is funny, it automatically means that we are not "that". So, "that" is funny; "that" is not normal; we are not "that"; so we are "normal". It is built into the logic of humour"* (Leo, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

Members talked about how a humorous remark, insightful joke or witty retort presented opportunities to connect in ways that shaped identities. Members constructed humour as a way to disturb structured perspectives, by altering the angle on things (Escarpit, 1969) through *"the infinite play of differences in meanings.... through socially constructed hegemonic practices" (Boje, 1995: 998)*. Interviewees talked about using humour to constitute distinct vantage points from which other members could view things differently (Sluss and Ashforth, 2007: 9): *"It [humour] goes back to breadth of experience.... I am able to look at things from different vantage points.... I can come from different angles"* (Matt, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

7.8 Social Connection

This section examines how members constructed humour as a form of connection that allowed them to constitute meaningful relationships with other individuals: *"You reveal yourself and put yourself out there for the possibility of connection and the rewards are greater the further you are willing to cast out something.... it is exciting when they get something that you threw out there; that is super obscure; just weird or not quite right"* (Sid, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing). Humour was for many, an extremely quick and easy way to build rapport and this allowed members to connect through familiar and comfortable modes of expression (Fox, 2004: 179):

> *"Laughter is the shortest distance between two people. In a sense, a lot of people walk into the Coop or walk into their shift thinking "who is going to be there; do I know people; will there be strangers; how will this go down"?... To be able to connect to people quickly is a great asset; to be able to connect with people, so that you are not working with strangers; to turn strangers into people that you have some level ground with is just amazing"* (Mandy, Volunteer Member, Office).

> *"You know a few people, with a lot of strangers constantly mixing in, so if you find the other person who thinks the same thing is funny, it is a connection on that shift"* (Claire, Volunteer Member, Office).

For many interviewees, humour provided an interesting and sometimes profound way of connecting with other members, allowing insights to coalesce, so that understandings often became shared in the moment (Sluss and Ashforth, 2007: 22). As Paul exemplifies, what members found funny provided important clues about their views and outlooks, presenting a picture of their identity that others comprehended implicitly (Goffman, 1959: 10):

> **"***Humour provides for common assumptions, common beliefs, shared experiences or shared perceptions of various things and it leads to human connection"* (Paul, Volunteer Member, Office).

Members talked about creating humour with each other through the subtlety of eye contact, providing an intuitive short hand for discreet views, so that understandings were shared without any recourse to verbal language (Holmes and Marra, 2002: 1693). As the following comments illustrate, members simply needed to make eye contact, laugh and move on. While no one had said anything, shared understanding had created a form of connection that often lingered long after:

> *"We do not even need to utter a word; with just a glance, we know we are on the same page"* (Leo, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

> **"***You can launch pages of dialogue with one look; just one understanding; particularly if you both slide into that"* (Sid, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

These connections were influential, because they did not rely on spoken words; they were built around tacit understandings that allowed members to relate empathetically (Sluss and Ashforth, 2007: 15): *"People communicate with their eyes, maybe more so than other environment…. there is an unspoken acknowledgement that other people feel similarly"* (Fleur, Volunteer Member, Receiving). Interviewees talked about how their sense of irony allowed them to connect with others simply by making eye contact and this acted as a contact point that indicated others were thinking alike in that moment:

> *"It all happens in the course of a five second interaction and it is amazing, because all these very subtle social cues are thrown at each other and we all get it"* (Sally, Volunteer Member, Shopping).

> *"It's a shared experience and the reason it's shared is because you perceive it the same way. You both think it is funny for whatever the reason is….. in doing that, you are giving some underlying message about what you believe"* (Paul, Volunteer Member, Office).

As Charles illustrates, irony and understatement were constructed as important tropes that influenced how members interpreted their surroundings (Oswick, Putnam and Keenoy, 2004). Members often made eye contact in order to share humour discreetly and these subtle connections often created an influential accord, with people relating without need for mere words:

> *"It really does make you feel closer; makes you feel like "we" are amongst these "other" people. We chose to be amongst them, so we are probably very similar to them, but even amongst this group, we have a connection and see things a certain way"* (Charles, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

Humour allowed members to acknowledge a shared perspective in an instant, providing a strong connection through the subtleties of irony, because certain views felt shared in order to appreciate the moment (Holmes, 2006: 27):

> *"People were trying to get the situation to move on, but the person was still around, so you saw people looking at each other and making eyes. It was wonderful; there were knowing glances and a smile in that. It was funny, but nobody was laughing outright"* (James, Volunteer Member, Orientations).

As Sally reveals, members did not have to create humour, they could simply share humour through a look or a glance that confirmed they were viewing their surroundings in the same way:

> *"You know right away if somebody shares the same kind of humour that you do. You know that means that they share an outlook on life that is similar to you. It is very clear. Everybody laughs, but when somebody laughs the way you do, there is a connection built that really sticks"* (Sally, Volunteer Member, Shopping).

Humour allowed members to connect with each other in subtle ways, so that even those who felt restricted by their environment, talked about eschewing joking out loud, in favour of ironic eye contact: *"Somebody is doing something or saying something, so you just catch the eye very quickly, you wonder if they've noticed it or not or if anybody has noticed it"* (Sandra, Full Time Coordinator). Members talked about deploying irony and understatement to determine whether they were alone in their perspectives. When another person found the same thing funny, many constructed this as a meaningful connection:

> *"Humour seems to be a really easy gateway to another person's mind; it is a really great way of connecting with someone, without having to sit down and have a whole conversation about society*" (Brenda, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

Here, Milla talks about ironic eye contact and how it often amplified mutual sentiments and accords:

> *"Someone will come in and say something to a coordinator and it is ridiculous, but obviously the coordinator cannot react to that, but may look across the room to catch your eye. You have to look away, because if you don't look away they are going to start cracking up [laughs]"* (Milla, Full Time Coordinator).

As Susie illustrates, humour constituted a private and discreet way of offering an opinion and when someone else found mirth in that, it had the potential to forge a strong connection with *"a kindred spirit"* (Susie, Volunteer Member, Office). For Susie, this was reassuring and affirming:

> *"Sometimes people are on tenterhooks, trying not to hurt other people's feelings and to avoid being out of sequence with the community at the Coop. So there is this acknowledgement; this notion that you can be humorous without saying a word.... I am getting some acknowledgement and sense of levity, in that we both find this entertaining.... when that person walks away, people can laugh about it and then it just passes, but some people hold onto it"* (Susie, Volunteer Member, Office).

Humour was an important medium that allowed members to connect in subtle, but compelling ways. These connections were often based on discrete and mutual perspectives that allowed members to bond in the moment: *"....it [humour] can create a connection and that is very important.... a certain amount of trust is involved; you are looking to create a bond, which makes it easier to get through things.... likeability, connection and trust are all things that can be enhanced by some kind of common humour"* (Paul, Volunteer Member, Office). The bonds fostered through shared laughter allowed members to form attachments that were not easily forgotten. Here, Susie constructs humour as a form of connection, where the joke itself becomes secondary to the experience of sharing laughter:

> *"When you get a stomach ache from laughing; I can think of a handful of times that I have cried and could not catch my breath. I cannot remember what was said, what "the joke" was, but I think about those moments and smile…. it is absurd that I have no idea what was said, but I remember the people I was with"* (Susie, Volunteer Member, Office).

Humour allowed members to connect with those individuals who shared similar histories, experiences and outlooks (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). Here, Bella talks about humour as a personal narrative, forged through interactions with influential others:

> *"A joke is fast and it is like a test you go through, "okay, they got that, so that means we are on this level", because these people have the same sense of humour. I can prejudge someone and know that I really like them when they laugh at my jokes, even though I know nothing about them, in a much different way than if we go to the same art gallery, or see the same movie. Then, you still do not really know a lot, but if they laugh at your jokes, then you connect with them"* (Bella, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

Members talked about how humour was a way to create empathy and shared perspectives that formed social bonds:

> *"You use it to sort out people, because you sometimes need someone who really gets you and who would be supportive. People want to be recognised…. by laughing with someone, you are recognising them"* (Jackie, Full Time General Coordinator).

> ***"****It is unspoken and in some sense unconscious… so much of it is dependent on your underlying feelings about the people that you are having an interaction with and humour is a big part of that"* (Paul, Volunteer Member, Office).

> *"I usually gravitate towards people who I can share that type of outlook with. If someone does not have it, then I tend to not want to associate with them. It is a matter of selecting the people and when I find someone, then we can do these riffs pretty well"* (Jon, Volunteer Squad Leader, Shopping).

As the following comments exemplify, humour presented opportunities for likeminded members to engage and align their views through a medium where dialogues were often introspective and cryptic, making shared humour feel more involved, personal and relational (Sluss and Ashforth, 2007: 22). For many interviewees, humour formed a mode of communication that felt profound:

> *"It [humour] is another way of connecting with like-minded people; people who understand me and I understand them. I find that if people don't understand my humour, they are probably not going to understand other esoteric stuff that I bring up"* (Gary, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

> *"Laughter is often simply an acknowledgement of something that is understood; that is connected to something that we know and share…. laughter in part, comes from the pleasure of making that connection. When we realise we share something unexpected; or we have something in common, it is often a cause of mirth"* (Fleur, Volunteer Member, Receiving).

As Rachel explains, the bonds established through humour created a sense of "togetherness" that shaped her sense of community and perspectives going forward:

> ***"****It [humour] helps people feel more comfortable or open to receiving information and just interacting with each other…. the bonding and togetherness that can happen through shared humour is what creates and builds togetherness, family, friendships and community"* (Rachel, Full Time Coordinator).

When a member shared something of themselves and others laughed it fostered common understandings and a sense of belonging that provided a degree of security and comfort: *"It is bonding through getting an in-joke or a point of reference; you may have only known them for five minutes, but it is a joke shared and so you are not alone"* (Susie, Volunteer Member, Office). Here, humour and laughter are constructed as an "intuitive synergy" between members, so that while perspectives and outlooks are still personal and intimate, they are no longer exclusive:

> ***"****There is something more tangible…. a sort of bonding and there is an intimacy that comes with that"* (James, Volunteer Member, Orientations).

> *"One of my instincts, when I meet somebody is to try and create that; where you laughed with them so that you feel a bond. If all you are doing is talking about something serious, it is unlikely to forge a bond in the same way…. it is probably not going to happen unless you are laughing about something"* (Jimmy, Volunteer Member, Receiving).

As Matt explains, understatement and irony connected him with others who shared his sense of humour, creating a discrete connection that extended beyond the confines of the organization:

> *"Jokes, whether only implied or actually said out loud are the basis for a lot of the bonds I have made in the workplace, not just at the Coop"* (Matt, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

As Charles exemplifies, members sensed that only certain others shared their humour and this constituted a feeling that the people in on the joke maintained similar views:

> *"There are so many clues that happen quickly, so that you get a pretty good sense of who is going to be down with you. The hard thing is that you are in a shared room, so you think "there are two people here, that I can make these jokes with, but everyone is going to hear and odds are, not all these people have a great sense of humour. You then have to make jokes about things that "these" people relate to, but the other people are not going to be offended by"* (Charles, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

When members joked and laughed with others it created an aesthetic experience that bonded individuals, creating a sense of unity (cf. Carter, McKinlay and Rowlinson, 2002: 520). Likewise, for many members, when they couldn't find any common ground to laugh together, it provided a sense of finality that needed no further elaboration:

> *"Cesc said something like "you know what, the thing is she just doesn't have much of a sense of humour" and we realised that is why we do not connect with her and don't really know how to relate to her"* (Laura, Volunteer Member, Childcare).

Here, Fred explains how humour involves drawing on similar experiences that allow him and others to relate in that moment. For many interviewees, laughter felt special, because it signalled they were not alone in their views and that was an important feeling (Foucault, 1994: 136-137):

> ***"****We all draw on our experiences, even if we do not verbalise them. In a situation like this; in an environment like the Coop, we can all somewhat relate. We have all run into "that person", even if we do not have a definitive encounter with them. I know what you are "talking about"; I know exactly what you mean. You*

can draw on your own experiences in that way, and it just makes you laugh. Laughter being the great unifier; the great icebreaker that it is, because you don't want to sit there stoically while someone's telling a funny story; you want to indicate, "yeah, I know what you mean" and urge them on" (Fred, Volunteer Member, Office).

Aware that others might not share the same perspective, Jackie reveals how the act of containing her mirth allowed her to form an instant bond with another coordinator:

"It [laughter] is an expression of an emotion I'm having. Sometimes in a meeting, I will see someone else sitting across the table and you both look down, because you know you are really trying to stifle it. There is something going on and the two of you unfortunately make eye contact and then you really have to look down because then you really could just break out in a peel of laughter at that point" (Jackie, Full Time General Coordinator).

Members talked about how shared humour shaped relationships, providing subtle and discrete associations that often fostered a sense of emotional attachment that was founded on similarities, but also on an acceptance and enjoyment of differences (Terrion and Ashforth, 2002: 55): *"Identity is at its core psychosocial: self and other; inner and outer; being and doing; expression of self for, with, against, or despite; but certainly in response to others. It is both those for whom one works and the work of loving"* (Josselson, 1994: 82). For many, humour constituted an intimate and personal form of communication that helped found meaningful relationships:

"It's [humour] pretty elemental to human connectivity; to our social spheres and who we can relate to. If you don't have a laugh with somebody, then they are not going to be a part of your inner circle; they are not going to be so relevant" (Tony, Volunteer Member, Office).

"It is real acceptance, you could take it all the way to it's a little bit of love, it's a little piece of love, not romantic love, but it's that extra thing" (Sid, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

Once an individual was aware that another member related to their views and insights, humour acted as a vehicle to test and strengthen that sense of mutuality (Sluss and Ashforth, 2007: 15); *"you figure it out really fast and it is not just the humour; there are other non-verbal clues happening"* (Emily, Volunteer Member, Food Processing). As Charles reveals, this perspective was strengthened when it was clear that others did not relate in the same way:

> ***"****I have told jokes at the Coop, where I have seen two people laugh and the others not laughing at all. That is always such a quick clue about who is people like me"* (Charles, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

Many interviewees constructed humour and laughter as vital to relationships, because humour created a veneer of consensus that confirmed similarities and underplayed differences: *"....the maintenance of this surface of agreement, this veneer of consensus, is facilitated by each participant concealing his own wants behind statements which assert values to which everyone present feels obliged"* (Goffman, 1959: 100). As Paul illustrates, members constructed humour as a form of association:

> *"It [humour] can create a connection and that is very important.... a certain amount of trust is involved; you are looking to create a bond, which makes it easier to get through things.... likeability, connection and trust are all things that can be enhanced by some kind of common humour"* (Paul, Volunteer Member, Office).

For some, the thing that set a relationship apart was the ability to make each other laugh and joke at each other's expense:

> *"It adds a sense of camaraderie and common purpose when you can find that sweet spot; where you can use banter very comfortably, because you know it is a safe person"* (Sarah, Volunteer Squad Leader, Food Processing).

As the following comments illustrate, humorous relationships became integral to how many members understood themselves in relation to others in the organization:

> **"***One of the reasons we choose to get close to people, is that they share enough in common to laugh at a similar things; those are my best friends and the ones who I share the most things with"* (Paul, Volunteer Member, Office).

> *"When I meet or work with anybody; anyone I am "surrounded" by; one the first rules in my head is, "if they get my humour then they are "my people". It is a system for organizing what matters to you and I guess for me, it is probably number one"* (Bella, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

Members talked about how humour allowed them to connect and relate with others, providing important associations that shaped how individuals constructed meanings and understandings. As interviewees revealed, social connections and relationships were often founded through humour. Dominant discourses surrounding empathy, reciprocation and community were reflected in members talk and became forms of influence that co-opted perspectives, fluidly providing interpretations about "what it was" to be a member (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). These dominant discourses allowed members to connect through subtle and discrete forms of humour, constituting mutual perspectives that helped shape identities (Sluss and Ashforth, 2007: 09): "*In any relationship, humour has a function…. gaining perspective, on an on-going and regular basis. It is a reality check, about what is actually happening; for people to communicate their interpretation of what is happening…. that happens in very small ways, in every relationship at work"* (Michael, Volunteer Member, Shopping).

7.9 Conclusion

This chapter presented multiple ways in which humour influenced identity construction at the Coop. Members talked about their sense of humour being central to their identity and vital to how they presented themselves to others (Goffman, 1959). Humour became an influential sensemaking device through which informants shared perspectives with other likeminded individuals, by drawing on multiple and dynamic discursive resources (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). Humour acted as a vehicle for sharing meanings and understandings, allowing members to feel less co-opted by dominant structures. Humour and laughter reflected individual interpretations, life stories and experiences from outside the organization, so that members were able to constitute identities of their own making (Starkey and McKinlay, 1998), allowing the intangible, subjective and relational to take precedence in social relations (Clegg *et al*., 2006). Members talked about humour providing multiple perspectives that connected discrete views and understandings in subtle and interesting ways, opening up space for members to connect and bond with others who shared the same sense of humour (Westwood and Johnston, 2011). Humour allowed meanings to become fractured and created space for discrete views to take precedence (Clegg *et al*., 2006: 295), shaping and maintaining relations of power through often competing discursive resources (Giddens, 1976).

These findings reflect my engagement with the literature on relations of power and how identities are drawn from discursive resources (Foucault, 1988; Giddens, 1991; Dahler-Larsen, 1997; Albert et al., 2000; Alvesson and Willmott, 2004). Members talked about how they mobilised humour to connect with each other discreetly through eye contact and how the mutual outlooks that this produced often led to social bonds that shaped their own perspectives and outlooks (Sluss and Ashforth, 2007). Members' constructed humour in concert with others, by intuitively engaging with dominant discourses to create subtle meanings and understandings that allowed individuals to perceive whether their own outlooks were aligned with others. Humour fed on and contributed to prevailing discourses, allowing members to inject multiple meanings and perspectives into conversations, aware that the laughter of others provided a polyphonic form of agreement and acknowledgement that others related in that moment (Boje, 2001).

8. Discussion

8.1 Introduction

This chapter is constructed to reflect and extend my reflexive journey within the organization, by presenting four readings that encompass what I term "climbing into the skin of my theoretical positions" in the chapter that follows (9.4). These readings allow the reader to comprehend humour and laughter at the Coop through the epistemological positions that were a presence in my thoughts as I progressed through my ethnography. Each reading will discuss the findings presented in chapters (5 to 7) and examine the same "impressionist tale" (Van Maanen, 1988) presented in the form of a vignette (No. 7) below. This vignette is a highly stylised version of a spring day and evokes the social world of the Coop. The stories presented frame how I came to develop and organize research materials in conjunction with my interview data. Each subsequent section will situate this central narrative, framing my interpretations from one particular perspective (Tyler, 1986) to allow the reader to comprehend how I came to organize research materials through my engagement with the literatures on ethnography, relations of power and identity to kick-start my analysis (Silverman, 2000: 128). The readings apply different epistemologies to the same setting, demonstrating that my interpretations were fostered through the interconnections inherent in my theoretical positions (2.8). Theoretical constructs illuminate the social setting, casting a distinctive shadow on events (Dyer and Wilkins, 1991) and *"demonstrate how differing frameworks contribute to our understanding of organisational behaviour"* (Hassard, 1991: 294).

The first section (8.2) examines the research findings and Vignette from an ethnographic position and discusses the ways that I came to construct meanings. The emphasis is on the subjective nature of the process and reflects my own assumptions and motivations (Bruner 1993). This discussion provides a natural jumping off point to consider the materials from idiosyncratic perspectives. The following section (8.3) utilises Goffman's (1959) essay on the presentation of the self to examine the ways in which members mobilised dominant discourses to connect and bond through humour. Members constructed humour as a mode of communication that fostered connections (and disconnections) between members and this section examines how these often subtle points of contact shape identity construction. The third section (8.4) provides a Foucauldian (1977; 1984; 1991) lens to examine the power in humour. The reading discusses various "micropractices" of power (Clegg, 1989), situating humour and laughter within regimes of truth, formed through relationships of power/knowledge that discipline meanings and interpretations (Foucault, 1990). This

discussion leads into the final section (8.5), examining humour and laughter's relation to structure and agency at the Coop. This reading provides a theoretical "lens" that further emphasises the interrelations between each viewpoint. I then provide a brief conclusion focusing on my theoretical perspectives (2.8) and how the questions that I brought to the site of enquiry helped ensure that I *"investigate[d] what was intended to be investigated"* (Kvale, 1996: 88). I then make my concluding remarks, focusing on the wider resonance of these research findings (Mason, 1996: 6), by discussing contributions; shortcomings and perspectives on future research.

8.2 Ethnographic Reading

8.2.1 Introduction

My thesis is indebted in part to Collinson's (1992) study focusing on humour and how it functions to engineer and maintain identities within organizations. I have sought to extend and reinterpret his text through my own theoretical positions (2.8) focusing on the power in humour (Deetz, 1992), with an emphasis on the *"communicative construction of identity, power and resistance"* (Mumby, 2001: 600). My agenda was to decide on how certain modes of influence became established at the Coop and how humour and laughter fostered discourse and was in turn promoted by organizational rhetoric in ways that appeared to transpire naturally as a result of the narrative games that give meaning to humour (Clegg, 1989). Research materials were crafted to demonstrate the various ways informant perspectives captured my theoretical perspectives (2.8) and the ways I have presented my informants' quotes does not necessarily reflect how they themselves would have framed their opinions (Rhodes, 2001: 43-44). For example, I constructed the sections within my findings chapter (6.) through my engagement with the literature on the "power in" discourse (Deetz, 1992) to unpack the *"complexities of often contradictory and indeterminate meanings that provide substance to organizational life"* (Mumby, 2011: 1150) to create and sustain a plurivocal account of how certain outlooks and understandings came to dominate the organization (Rhodes, 2000).

8.2.2 Impressionist Tales

As with all my vignettes, this narrative (No. 7) was written to entertain, to represent my authorial presence and to provide "relived experiences" (Richardson, 1994) from which the reader can gain a greater sense of the organization and my perspectives as researcher and member (Geertz, 1973). The events depicted were furnished through my engagement with field notes written at the time, but I recognise that my recollections undoubtedly differ to how others would tell the same story (Rhodes, 2001). I can make no claims to represent the opinions of those present and this reading is constructed to demonstrate how meanings are rarely straight-forward and interpretations are highly subjective. It is entirely possible that the person *"who does not perceive the comic dimension of social reality is going to miss essential features of it"* (Berger, 1963: 165). However, the process of finding something funny is multifaceted and personal, so that what I found relevant reflects my own research interests. My findings are a product of the way I organized and wrote-up the research materials and this discussion is an overt attempt to augment the research process by making it more apparent (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995: 239). The *"interpretive practice of making sense of one's findings is both artful and political"* (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998: 30) and rather than place my own outlooks in the background, I wish to demonstrate my constant attempt to remain reflexive throughout the entire project (Van Maanen, 1979). The patterns of thought and behaviour quoted verbatim within my findings chapters formed iterative checks against the possibility of a narcissistic account (Bruner, 1993) and allowed me to ground my own stories of the organization in the ideas and perspectives of my informants. This exploration of patterns of meaning took place throughout the entirety of the project, continuing right up to the final write-up (Fetterman, 1989: 88).

Vignette No. 7 - Three Short Stories

The air, that New York crisp dry air feels welcoming, like milk poured from a glass container, left to chill overnight. The sun pierces the street amidst shadows cast by trees. Brown stones and trees, sunlight and shadows, a UPS truck is parked below, a fire engine drives past sirens bouncing off the buildings, the driver hits the horn and "BLAAAHHH", he jolts me out of my reverie, cars begrudgingly pull to the side, push bikes take to the pavement, pedestrians march on, no one stops to look, this is spring time New York. The city feels clean, vibrant, welcoming. I stand on my stoop a few moments longer, drinking in the atmosphere. People jog past.... ear plugs in, *"you really got me going, you got me so I don't know what I'm doing"*, I hit the street with a bounce and head uphill, towards the park, past Rosewater, Union Market, Hunan Delight, the Coop sign lit green ahead. I take my ear phones out, people chat outside, smiles, *"laughs, hi yas and catch you next Tuesdays"*, the worker who checks my pass gives me a breezy *"enjoy"*.... I arrive for my shift in Food Processing and it appears the mood has carried over. A hint of March madness is in the air and we are off to the races.... peals of laughter greet me, members' exchange pleasantries while donning

aprons, familiar faces are grouped around the central tables, laughing at something said, something I missed.... that familiar feeling of curiosity hits me, not as researcher, you understand, no, I am the person who missed the joke and feels momentarily uncomfortable, someone on the outside. I head over to the laughter and as it dies away, start chatting with Twila.... I bring up "the" article in the New York Times.... nannies working their employers' shifts at the Coop; *"oh please, at least it's a change from making us all out to be a bunch of vegan pacifists, I mean who do they think works here?"* Humour takes that most precious of gifts, our attention, others are filtering, interpreting, searching for meaning.... her line takes hold and Tim and Ray are quick to keep the ball in the air.... *"oh yeah, I sent my nanny in last week with my baby still in her ergo [a harness for the baby to lie against your chest]; they worked a shift in receiving unloading the trucks"... "As soon as we have a baby and a nanny, I am sending them both in here".* I joke, "you can borrow mine; they both prefer an office shift"..... And so it goes....

Ray departs to restock the worst of the empty shelves and the conversation loses momentum.... he is back and comes steaming over to the three of us, waving a bag of loose parmesan that resembles a typical bag found in any supermarket, anywhere.... *"This woman came storming up and tells me "do you know that this loose parmigiano contains cellulose", so I said, I am extremely sorry madam, I will take it away at once"*. We all laugh for some time and others come over to find out what is going on. I offer to take it back up and head off with the offending cheese and a shopping basket of nuts, all bagged and tagged, ready for action. Laughter often provides a soundboard for ideas and Ray's story plants a seed... I return to find the whole room "in on a joke", laughing faces everywhere ... Ray is quick to explain, *"we have been trying to figure out the most politically correct product at the Coop and came up with "raw, organic, free trade, raised by grass fed virgins"*… peals of laughter.... and some glee, as I quickly take out my notebook....

An Hasidic member arrives in white shirt, black trousers and large hat, looking far better dressed than our motley crew, all rocking day glow yellow bandannas and clashing neon green aprons that make us look like over-aged kids TV presenters. He asks politely if he can work a "make up" bagging kosher produce, Twila smiles and says "please". He smiles back and produces an understated black apron of his own and gets to work, looking every bit like he should be put in charge of the inmates. Tim is curious and asks *"why is it only Jewish members can handle kosher food at the Coop"*? We are even starting to act like kindergarten TV hosts. Our new friend explains, *"beats me, it is just a rule at the Coop"*? With a shrug of the shoulders thrown in, *"kosher refers to the initial preparation"*. He smiles as he says this and I feel his sense of irony. Twila jokes *"they never miss an opportunity to create a rule for everything around here"*. Ray volunteers *"it is probably to avoid lawsuits, he turns to me, "it's like the olives with pips removed, we label them "care, may contain pips" after a member cracked a tooth and sued the Coop"*. I find the irony of this story funny and so Twila produces the same labels out of a draw and places one on her apron as though she just got a promotion at McDs. The shift draws to an end and people are beginning to leave, replaced by members of the next squad. A flamboyant young man arrives, very light on his feet and announces loudly *"hi, I am a vegan, but would like to slice and price the cheese"*, flashing a big grin. Without giving it any thought, I reply straight faced "there is a rule at the Coop that vegans cannot carry out cheese cutting", at which Twila, Ray and Tim burst out laughing. He looks worried.... are we laughing at him? Is there a rule? How should he respond? Will processing slabs of cheese undermine his vegan principles? I smile at him, aware he has missed the irony, taking strange pleasure in his discomfort, "of course you can fella" and hand him the cheese slicer. He still looks perplexed as I start taking off my apron, ready to step back out into the light....

8.2.3 An Ethnographic Interpretation of Vignette (No. 7)

The "lived experiences" depicted in vignette (No. 7) provide the reader access to discourses that permeated the organization and that influenced my own conceptions as I negotiated the Coop in the early stages of participant observation (Denzin, 1995: 9). Humour that centred on organizational rules, outside perceptions, over-zealousness and entitlement were a regular part of my encounters. These "situated narratives" helped me to locate my theories and ideas within the Coop (Silverman, 1993) and the themes that emerge from my account of everyday life at the Coop made up part of my initial coding (Erikson, 1968: 149). My vignettes do not stand outside of the research materials that make up the research findings. These stories and perceptions are constructed to give substance to my claims and create a rich tapestry for others to picture my outlooks, my authorial personality and my involvement in the scene (Butler, 1997). By writing myself into the narrative and presenting the story in the first person, I have deliberately allowed the reader to comprehend my participation and involvement in the construction of humour and laughter (Watson, 1994). For example, how I aligned myself with the group by participating in "inside jokes". This activity was not an overt attempt to benefit my research, rather it represented my natural inclination to "poke fun" and joke with others, even though I was aware that these inclinations meant that I subtly altered the environment (Stacey, 1996: 261).

The purpose of the vignettes is to create an authorial text and it is important to recognise that in the process of writing, I have borrowed freely from various sources of inspiration, including literatures, conversations and personal experiences that helped lend a sense of the universal to my own realities (Norrick, 1989: 118) [40]. The picture of ordinary life presented in this vignette (No. 7) was substantiated and expanded through conversations of purpose with informants, bringing to life the ways in which members constructed humour and laughter to affect meanings (Burgess, 1984: 102). In taking their narratives into account, I have actively searched for signals that would reinforce my own beliefs, aware that alternative perspectives were often filtered out through my implicit adherence to my theoretical positions (2.8) (Berger and Wildavsky, 1994). For example, the shared laughter within these stories creates a shared storyline (Rhodes and Brown, 2005), forming the impression that all members laughing were of the same view. As Bergson (1956: 169-170) argues, *"the effect must appear to us as an average effect, as expressing an average…. that observation is always external and the result is always general"*. My participants often constructed laughter as a *"discoursal clue"* that

40 *"Once or twice she had peeped into the book her sister was reading, but it had no pictures or conversations in it, "and what is the use of a book," thought Alice, "without pictures or conversations?"* (Lewis Carrol, Alice in Wonderland: 1).

others were in agreement (Holmes, 2000: 163) and this perspective influenced my own beliefs, as this construction of reality fitted with my own interests and allowed me to put aside the numerous alternative discursive realities inherent in all forms of communication and particularly in laughter. To my mind then, shared laughter fostered an impression that understandings and views were no longer ambiguous: *"One of the skills which we all acquire, to varying degrees, is that of employing humour to help deal with the problems of multiplicity and contradiction, incongruity and incoherence which are built into our organized patterns of social action"* (Mulkay, 1988: 214).

A humourist rejects desiccated interpretations for bold and engaging perspectives (Davis, 1993), an analogy that reflects my own attempts to interpret research materials from a distinct perspective. My interpretive study was a deliberate attempt to elevate informants' perceptions to a theoretical level, by reinterpreting my participants' views from my own standpoint (Carter, *et al.*, 2002). My "interpretive perspective" was a persistent influence (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998: 26) and it was only natural that my ideas and perspectives influenced the views of other members and particularly those with whom I had formed relationships. For example, I was not aware that others were joking about a "perfect product" until their laughter stopped my own reflections and piqued my interest. It was only when I enquired that Ray enjoyed explaining, aware of my academic interest, but unaware that it was myself who had started this line of thinking by joking with Twila about stereotypes perpetuated in the media. Twila had then taken up the theme with the others, so that their humour and laughter was influenced by my own rhetoric, *"invoking a context for meaning making"* (Tsoukas and Hatch, 2001: 998).

My research epistemology recognises that discourse is exercised reflexively within relations of power and that this applies to my own perspectives; an embodiment of the influence that others brought to bear within interactions, conversations and interviews (Boje *et al.*, 1999). For example, the vignette draws on the perspectives of the central characters and it was fascinating to listen to Twila's interview and hear a comment that came to shade the final write-up. As such, this narrative embraces a creative emphasis that legitimises member's talk through various acts of verisimilitude (Van Maaden, 1988; Lincoln and Denzin, 1998) to position the reader within relations of power, allowing them to construct a picture of the organization, which to some extent, mirrors my own perceptions and outlooks (Foucault, 1972). I have provided a text which is designed to engage the reader and create a unified version of events that appears on the surface to reflect the views and sentiments of the central characters. For example, vignette (No. 7) mobilises discourses constructed by informants and in so doing masks my authorial agenda, one that deliberately places the reader within relations of power, by privileging certain discourses at the Coop (Rhodes and Brown, 2005). The reader,

having digested the research findings, can locate a number of key themes within this narrative that add seeming legitimacy to my interpretations (Brown, 2004).

This reading reflected the theories, interpretations and sources of inspiration that provided meaning to my interpretations, as I manoeuvred through the organization and semi-structured interviews. My participants provided multifaceted accounts of humour that allowed me to reinterpret many of my own assumptions, so that to some extent, my thesis became an inquiry from the inside (Evered and Louis, 1981) and I discussed how my vignettes and reflexive account (9.) imprinted my authorial personality on the final write up (Alvesson, *et al*., 2008), allowing the reader to construct the various ways I privileged certain ways of speaking (Watson, 1994), situating my own voice within relations of power that shaped members of the Coop (Foucault, 1977).

8.3 A Reading - Employing Goffman's Presentation of Self

8.3.1 Introduction

This section examines the interplay of humour and identity, employing Goffman's essay on the presentation of self (1959) as a framework to discuss how humour acted to connect and bond members of the Coop. A picture of organizational life that blends behaviour and meaning (Rosen, 1991: 7) to provide the reader with further scope to construct how identities were constructed through the mobilization of dominant discourses. Goffman's (1959) essay lends itself to discursive enquiry and creates a novel framework to gain further insight into the outlooks of members, by providing a theoretical lens that focuses on the way humour and laughter fostered interactions that constituted identities (Mumby, 2009). As such, this section can be understood as a descriptive text that is not purely factual, but rather a "performance" that seeks to influence the audience (Goffman, 1959), by constructing humour as integral to *"identity formation and meaning creation"* at the Coop (Mumby, 2001: 614). The central theme within this section examines how members mobilised humour to constitute dominant discourses that constructed flexibility as central to cooperation and to discuss the affect this had on interactions and identities. Humour constructed through dominant patterns of knowledge and power became a vital and influential form of awareness (Foucault, 1988: 19) that framed how individuals presented themselves (Goffman, 1959).

8.3.2 Presentation of Self

Humour allowed organizational members to relate to one another reflexively through the transmission of discourses that became dominant frames of reference and influenced how individuals presented themselves (Goffman, 1959). Members spoke about interacting with others through humour and laughter in ways that disciplined meanings, so that members often constructed themselves as flexible and cooperative as opposed to rigid and demanding (5.6). Members were disciplined by dominant perspectives *"to the extent that they became objects of knowledge of various discourses"* (Mumby, 2001: 606). These dominant discourses constituted *"informal, or hidden, disciplinary practices that formed part of the everyday network of power relations"* (Casey, 1999: 172). For example, shared laughter was constructed as mutual and connecting and this placed pressure on other members to conform through their *"tone of voice, pitch and gestures…. [expressing] their range of attitudes"* (Curco, 1996: 6 emphasis added). While this allowed those who had dissimilar outlooks to feel comfortable in the moment, it also gave members pause to consider their relation to others and this became an influential and meaningful signal to participants (6.6), who talked about humour shaping views, interactions and relationships (Fineman, 2000).

Members constructed humour as an intuitive system for comprehending others (6.5), so that humour often became a jumping-off point that allowed members to build the social landscape and form associations through signs revealed in gestures, reactions and tones (Holmes, 2000: 163), subtly repositioning themselves in relation to others who appeared to internalise some views at the expense of other dominant outlooks found within the community (Davies, 1982: 400). Members constructed humour as a natural way to connect with others (7.8), but their comments and narratives also implied a degree of disconnect with those who did not share outlooks inherent in the construction of dominant humour (5.2). For example, the members of Food Processing constructing the "ideal product" to demonstrate that they did not subscribe to a perception that other members over-emphasised the importance of how food was produced[41]. Humour fostered association through the rhetoric of difference, *"provoking laughter less at those who shared too few traits than at those who shared too many"* (Davis, 1993: 163).

Humour that was based around certain members being rigid, over-serious, too earnest or over-zealous, became a recognizable practice by which members *"[became], as subject, an object of knowledge"* (Foucault, 1994: 315), shaping identities through the mobilization of dominant discourse. This was evident in how members constructed humour on flexibility (5.5),

41 *"Concepts have no meaning in themselves, the only meaning they have is differential"* (Saussure, quoted in Berger and Wildavsky, 1994: 83).

autonomy (6.8) and individuality (7.3) to shape how they *"[defined] themselves within organizational contexts"* (Sluss and Ashforth, 2007: 27). Humour allowed organizational members to relate to one another through the transmission of discourses and this framed how individuals presented themselves (Goffman, 1959). Humour was often constructed as mutual and inclusive by members seeking to relate with other likeminded people (5.4), but at the same time, many informants revealed their sense of distance from those who were too rigid, serious or earnest. The *"element in our personality, that mechanical element which resembles a piece of clockwork wound up once for all and capable of working automatically"* (Bergson, 1956: 156-157). As members pointed out, these "stereotypes" were constructs upon which others could rally against (5.3), so that being flexible and accommodating became informal values through which many members connected and identified (5.5). Members who over-emphasised rules and procedures became embedded in narratives that structured humour, so that discourses centring on flexibility became a *"contact point, where individuals are driven by others… tied to the way they conduct themselves"* (Foucault, 1993: 204).

8.3.3 Shared Outlooks – Constructing Vignette (No. 7)

For many informants, humour became a mode of interaction that allowed them to elaborate perspectives and understandings in relation to others (Rhodes and Brown, 2005). Vignette (No. 7) describes a scene where the central characters appear on the surface to be confidantes and friends. However, this was not the case; rather social relations were transitory and built in the moment through relations of power that structured views and understandings. This is evident in vignette (No. 7) in the way we mobilise humour, fostered through dominant discourses that circulate the organization (5.2). While there were other members present, the meanings and interpretations that fostered humour spoke louder and clearer to some than others, turning and stirring emotions in ways that connected perspectives (Fineman, 2003: 17). The surge of mirth that greeted me on my arrival from the shopping floor fed subsequent humour, by framing outlooks and bonding sentiment (Dunbar, 2004), so that alternative identities were superseded by a group identity synchronized through humour (Sluss and Ashforth, 2007: 15):

> *"….the maintenance of this surface of agreement, this veneer of consensus, is facilitated by each participant concealing his own wants behind statements which assert values to which everyone present feels obliged…. We have then a kind of interactional modus vivendi. Together the participants contribute to a single over-all definition of the situation which involves not so much a real agreement as to what exists but rather a real agreement as to whose claims concerning what issues will be temporarily honoured"* (Goffman, 1959: 20-21).

While all members worked at the Coop in order to shop, we had preferred in this instance to construct a group identity that did not conform to widely held views within the organization. Instead, we preferred to affect an ambivalent framework that bonded perspectives and allowed discrete outlooks to become mutually manifest (Fineman, 2000). Our shared laughter was constituted through cooperation and social support (5.3), so that humour became central to how we comprehended our environment (Sluss and Ashforth, 2007) and in order to maintain this emotional bond, we were constantly on the alert for social symbols, adapting ourselves to ensure that our outlooks reflexively fitted with each other (Bergson, 1911). Humour became a sensemaking device that allowed us to share perspectives about what constituted being a typical member of the community (Weick, 1995: 6). This ideological manipulation (Lemke, 2000) was in the interest of pleasure and mutuality, so that our laughter acted to bond sentiments in the moment and signalled that we had identified with one another through shared emotion (Fineman, 2000).

8.3.4 Interactions That Shape Identities

Goffman's (1959) essay examines the dynamic relations that occur when people interact with one another. He was particularly interested in the way people construct their emotions and outlooks in the company of others and believed that people are better equipped to pierce fronts than they are at sustaining face-work in order to maintain pretence. Therefore, all interactions are unbalanced and influenced by rhetoric, behaviour and relations of power:

> *"Organizations are precarious entities that rely on systems of norms, values, rituals, beliefs, and so forth, in order to be maintained and reproduced. And, of course, it is up to us, the social actors who are the communicative stuff of organizing to engage in the face work necessary to make sure that the basic organizational fabric is not rent asunder when its fragility is momentarily exposed"* (Mumby, 2009: 317).

As members revealed, while certain aspects of the organization reproduced themselves, humour created a degree of agency at the Coop (5.5). Humour and laughter provided vital clues that helped define a person and group and those who preferred to enact identities that were *"socially validated through interaction"* (Sluss and Ashforth, 2007: 13), so that identities were subtly altered through the intersection of prevailing views and interpretations (Clegg, 1989). Humour helped define perceptions and understandings that made up the social space and allowed members to glimpse the internal workings of others, where reactions informed

"how best to act in order to call forth a desired response" (Goffman, 1959: 13). This was evident in how members talked about mobilising humour to comprehend others intuitively (6.5) and in the way members constructed humour to mobilise dominant discourses that shaped relationships (7.8). Humour became a dominant mode of face-to-face interaction at the Coop, fostering social connection and relatedness between members making sense of the organization and organizational life (Rhodes and Brown, 2005: 171).

8.3.5 Involuntary Expressive Behaviour

Important signs are found within all humorous interactions, so that those clued-in are able to indirectly ascertain *"true or real attitudes, beliefs and emotions…. through what appears to be involuntary expressive behaviour"* (Goffman, 1959: 13-14). Members constructed humour as an intuitive system that allowed them to gauge the reactions of others and sense whether views aligned in the moment (7.8). This face-work became a mode of interaction that became a *"check and balance on the magnitude of identification"* (Sluss and Ashforth, 2007: 22). Humour was constructed by members as a *"practically enacted theory"* that allowed individuals to change their situation and observe the reaction of others (Critchley, 2007: 28). These identity games were a natural and universal activity between members who sought to acquire information about the views and understandings of others[42]. This was reflected in the way members constructed humour as a sensemaking device that allowed them to comprehend others meaningfully. Members talked about humour allowing them to discern attitudes that were given off, as opposed to simply given (6.5), providing *"a wide range of action that others can treat as symptomatic of the actor, the expectation being that the action was performed for reasons other than the information conveyed in this way"* (Goffman, 1959: 14).

8.3.6 Information Games

This section examines how informants constructed humour as a form of communication that created and maintained *"a wedge between the individual and his role, between being and doing"* (Goffman, 1961: 108). Members talked about how they could disengage and re-established themselves quickly and easily through humour (6.8), creating separation between their identity and the parts they play (Coser, 1966): *"….by introducing an unserious style, the individual can project the claim that nothing happening at the moment…. should be taken as a direct reflection"* (Goffman, 1961: 105). In this way, the person joking has an important element of control, because the reactions of others imply meaning, while the words used to

42 *"….some of this information seems to be sought almost as an end in itself" (Goffman, 1959: 13).*

furnish mirth imply incongruity and jest, not serious opinion (Burns, 1953: 654):

> *"Now given the fact that others are likely to check up on the more controllable aspects of behaviour by means of the less controllable, one can expect that sometimes the individual will try to exploit this very possibility, guiding the impression he makes through behaviour …. This kind of control upon the part of the individual reinstates the symmetry of the communication process, and sets the stage for a kind of information game - a potentially infinite cycle of concealment, discovery, false revelation, and rediscovery"* (Goffman, 1959: 19).

Humour affects emotional states, so that mirth, embarrassment, annoyance and insincerity are often revealed in that moment. While an individual may put on a front or performance to mask their feelings, subtle clues are often revealed by the strategies through which the individual represents their identity to themselves. These *"technologies of the self"* (Foucault, 1988: 19) allow others to intuitively sense the dissociation implicit in an act. This places the person joking and those observing in asymmetrical relations of power, where:

> *"the arts of piercing an individual…. seem better developed than our capacity to manipulate our own behaviour, so that regardless of how many steps have occurred in the information game, the witness is likely to have the advantage"* (Goffman, 1959: 20).

Members talked about humour providing a vital impression that revealed the ambiguity and incongruity implicit in an affected outlook or suppressed trait (6.5) (Moliere, 1964)[43]. Constructed through dominant patterns of knowledge and power (5.5), these *"disruptions [came] to play a significant role in the social life of the group"* (Goffman, 1959: 25), constituting connections and departures (Radcliffe-Brown, 1965: 91) that became a vital and influential awareness of actuality (6.7) and elevated language beyond verbal symbols (Mumby, 2001: 595):

43 *"Laughter is the cipher key wherewith we decipher the whole man" (Thomas Carlyle, 1833 quoted in Davis, 1993: 1).*

> *"Others may divide what they witness into two parts; a part that is relatively easy for the individual to manipulate at will, being chiefly his verbal assertions, and a part in regard to which he seems to have little concern or control, being chiefly derived from the expressions he gives off"* (Goffman, 1959: 18).

To feign amusement convincingly often means that others need to perceive both identity and mirth coalesce, so that a laugh faked was constructed as extremely revealing by informants keen to identify with those around them (6.4): *"Humour reveals the discrepancy between essence and appearance, between inner self and outer identity claims"* (Davis, 1993: 251). This pretence is often at odds with a person's identity, so that humour can feel extremely unsettling and in that moment it is not unusual for others to *"perceive the various simulations.... [to] amuse themselves by unmasking them…. [and] experience something inherent and essential to social living"* (Pirandello, 1974: 139), games of truth (Mumby, 2001) that structure and discipline views through the dominant discourses that frame everyday interactions.

This reading examined how members shared humour that constituted dominant discourses and shaped identities (Foucault, 1988). Participants talked about humour being an essential language game (Clegg et al., 2006: 295) that allowed them to connect with others through shared outlooks and perspectives (Sluss and Ashforth, 2007). Shared laughter and mirth provided social indicators that became central to interactions, allowing individuals to comprehend dominant views and understandings (Fineman, 2003: 16). The reading finished by exploring how humour is constructed through discourses that shape emotional responses, so that people unintentionally emit social signals that reveal how closely aligned they are with the views of others (Foucault, 1991: 173).

8.4 A Foucauldian Reading - The Power in Humour

8.4.1 Introduction

This reading examines how dominant discourses within humour created power/knowledge relationships that became embedded in conversations (Foucault, 1980). This "power in" humour and laughter flowed through networks of relationships to create dominant representations of reality (Deetz, 1992), manifest in the things that members found funny (Foucault, 1977). Humour and laughter provided a mode of influence where power was less explicit and more ambiguous, supporting dominant positions that stabilized meaning structures (Rhodes and Brown, 2005: 174):

> *"….very few individuals are aware that their responses to humour stimuli may be significant psychologically… in the world of humour, persons are easily caught off their guard"* (Roberts and Johnson, 1957: 62).

In an organization where informality and democracy were valued and power differences de-emphasised (Fairclough, 1995), humour and laughter disciplined members through *"the vigilance of intersecting gazes"* (Foucault, 1977: 217). Power is tied to *"the ability of individuals and groups to control and shape dominant interpretations"* (Mumby, 2001: 595) and humour often supported dominant positions. However, meanings were contextual and shifting, so that over time discourses were subtly and inescapably altered (Clegg, 1989).

8.4.2 The "Power in" Humour and Laughter

Members constructed humour through dominant discourses that stressed the importance of connectivity, mutuality and reciprocation (5.3). Humour and laughter are *"in the centre stage of human life"* (Davis, 1993: 5), rendering their social influence invisible (Foucault, 1988): *"The best ideas aren't hidden in shadowy recesses. They're right in front of us, hidden in plain sight…. innovation seldom depends on discovering obscure or subtle elements, but in seeing the obvious with fresh eyes"* (Farson and Keyes, 2003: 75). Humour fluidly merges and shapes discourse, influencing and determining desires, pleasures and meanings (cf. Lukes, 1974: 23), by incorporating stories and jokes that supplement institutional texts with individual interpretations (Boje, 1995) and makes manifest members' ability to switch assumptions, allowing new perspectives to take charge in the moment (6.9). Members talked about using humour to socially engage others (6.2), to add authority to their perspectives (6.7) and to subtly influence others (6.6), by playing with the meanings of discourse and in so doing, contributed

to both "*the stability [and] enlargement of language"* (Samuel Johnson, 1709 to 1784).

The dynamic interactions that humour fostered were amplified by laughter, an empathic and associative force within relationships (Roberts and Johnson, 1957). Shared laughter provided a *"cultural artefact, something [that was] peculiar to the personal, social and communicative setting"* (Fineman, 2003: 16) and members talked about how they were engaged by the sound of laughter and influenced by its mimetic references (6.6). Laughter was constructed as "an event", where *"the power of laughter, [was] in the laughter"* (Baudelaire, 1972: 148), with just the mere sound providing a signal that members were speaking emphatically (6.4). Laughter is a form of communication that *"appears to stand in need of an echo"* (Bergson, 1956: 64) and members constructed shared laughter as a form of agreement that gave them pause to consider their position: *"The essential nature of laughter, the way it is occasioned, where it is seated, and how it comes into being*" (Cicero, 1942: 373) provides influence to meaning (Goffman, 1961: 97). Laughter provided a check and balance that opened up the possibility of transformation (6.7), because *"to laugh with others presupposes some degree of common definition of the situation"* (Coser, 1960: 81). Laughter shaped, shifted and synchronized perspectives, so that what was unstable often became unified the moment individuals laughed together (7.8).

8.4.3 Playing With Reality – Vignette (No. 7) Considered

A Foucauldian reading conceptualises power as a claim on meaning (Clegg, 1989), recognising that reality is not manifold, but is influenced and maintained through relations of power that structure and homogenise meanings (Knights and Willmot, 1989). Members constituted dominant discourses through humour and this is evident in vignette (No. 7), where we joked about the arbitrary nature of the rules (5.6) and a member who took things too seriously and over emphasised how food was produced (5.2). Humour allowed us to play with these dominant discourses, so that:

> *"….sense-making [was] not simply the product of mutually shared assumptions and interpretive procedures…. the creation of intersubjective structures of meaning existed in a dialectical relationship with organizational relations of power"* (Mumby, 2001: 595).

Humour is a personal and communal tradition that presents a subjective view of the social, opening up space for constructive ways in which to interact with our surroundings, through "micropractices" of power that give meaning to experiences (Clegg, 1989). When we shared

jokes about letting our nannies work our shifts, we were no longer restrained by our environment, mobilising elements of fantasy in order to construct shared perspectives (Gabriel, 1995). Humour can twist and turn rhetoric, reframing endeavours and shifting attention through a subtle remodelling of the facts. Humour brings structures into focus and opens up informal avenues of enquiry (Mumby, 2001), where *"verbal play reminds us of the artifice of the work we are experiencing, distances us from its mimetic referents"* (Winston, 1978: 39 quoted in Davis, 1993: 51).

The mutual perceptions that this furnished provided an environment where we were free to share discrete ideas and perspectives, some of which influenced the group. Humour allowed us to employ our intuition and insights to foster tropes and rhetoric that others related to, providing a shared language and sentiment that became extremely influential in the formation of opinions: *"....because of the character of human entanglements the variables of desire and pleasure become vital in any true analysis of power"* (Dixon, 2011: 290). Throughout vignette (No. 8) we prefer the shared meanings that connect us to each other (8.8) and bonded through shared perspectives made explicit in our laughter and mirth (6.4). Humour constituted this desire and permitted *"individuals to effect by their own means, or with the help of others, a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality"* (Foucault, 1988: 18). This allowed us to co-construct regimes of power and knowledge in dynamic ways (Foucault, 1980), playing with social reality in an on-going search to connect and relate with one another. Members reflexively constructed juxtapositions in concert with each other and this play on form acted to suppress alternative perspectives and elevated relational meanings (Sluss and Ashforth, 2007).

8.4.4 Modifying Discourse

Humour became a common mode of integration that often relied on dominant discourses in its creation, but not necessarily in its execution, providing an opportunity to re-imagine and *"play with institutionalized meanings in interactional settings"* (Zijderveldl, 1995: 345). Humour and laughter are dependent on social context and constitutive of relations of power, providing multiple constructions that feed discursive resources:

> *"Serious discourse presents the world as it supposedly is; the normal, taken for granted world in which contradictions and ambiguity, inconsistencies and diversity in interpretations are awkward. Humorous discourse, on the other hand thrives on these things"* (Stromberg and Karlsson, 2009: 633).

Humour provides an important resource, allowing individuals to interpret and modify discourse, demonstrating that the mobilization of language is reflexive. People are "delicately attuned" (Mandel, 1970) to the multiplicity within all discourse, so that meanings become fluid, influenced by humour and the reactions of others. Humorous viewpoints *"wax and wane as perceptions open and close"* (Mandel, 1970: 77), so that something once concrete or serious can become at once amusing, through the "*mental shock of being jolted out of a whole frame of mind, a whole universe of discourse, with all sorts of rich associations, all sorts of stock responses leaping to the forefront of consciousness"* (Monro, 1951: 45). Humour pervades perspectives, so that what an individual finds funny extends to others (6.7), a reflexive process where the construction of reality is subtly altered, giving way to a sense that there is some incongruity between knowing and being (Davis, 1993).

8.4.5 Games of Truth

Members constructed humour as *"a source of power in social interactions"* (Giddens, 1979: 92) that moderated and defined the limitless possibilities inherent within discourse (6.7) (Clegg, 1989). Humour and laughter were part of the practices and techniques that rendered power effective (6.2) (Knights and Willmott, 1989), constituting *"games of truth"* (Mumby, 2001: 594), where members drew on the influence of discursive resources to shape perspectives (5.2) (Giddens, 1976). All social contexts are comprised of relations of power that stabilise social relations (Foucault, 1990). These regimes of truth form power knowledge relationships *"that reveal what is already there"* (Mumby, 2009: 317). The tropes and textures of humour reflect these dominant positions, but also create novel and sudden changes of perspective, constructing a "vital force" within relations of power (Bergson, 1998). Humour and laughter *"pass beyond the bounds of reason and society and give glimpses of a truth which escapes through the mesh of structured concepts"* (Douglas, 1979: 105). Power does not lie in authority, it is based on modes of influence (Clegg *et al*., 2006) and to *"forgo prescribed activities, or to engage in them in unsubscribed ways or for unprescribed purposes, is to withdraw from the official self and the world officially available to it"* (Goffman, 1961: 170). Hence power is irrational and the opposite of authority. It is *"what occupies that space that authority has not colonised"* (Clegg et al., 2006: 121). The informal and irrational is where power often flourishes (Goffman, 1961) and humour can be understood as a *"language game of discipline"* that underscores the complexity of organization (Boje, 1995: 1031).

8.4.6 Transforming

The inherent incongruities within dominant discourses fed humour and allowed members to influence the perspectives of others (6.7): "….*in relating himself to the environment there will emerge for him a contradiction…. this comical aspect, however does not exist for others, who [at present] know nothing about it"* (Kierkegaard, 1968: 446, quoted in Davis, 1993: 283). Humour presents language as transforming and influential, reminding people that discourse is enabling and demonstrating that the relations of knowledge/power within even dominant discourses is contextual and open to reinterpretation through competing rhetoric. This power in humour reflexively engages the narrative of meaning, so that discourse is never static (Weick, 1995). Members constructed humour as absorbing (6.2) and influential (6.7), often leading to shared perspectives that formed important connections (7.8), *"at such times…. we do not suddenly acquire new norms. The standard is awareness; it is not necessarily an allegiance"* (Mandel, 1970: 83). Humour destabilised dominant discourses by revealing and emphasising their fluidity (Berger, 1963):

> *"….a changing equilibrium; it is a continual awakening and obliterating of emotions, tendencies, and ideas; an incessant fluctuating between contradictory terms…. This conflict of memories, hopes, forebodings, perceptions and ideals can be seen as a struggle of various souls which are all fighting amongst themselves for the exclusive and final power over our personalities"* (Pirandello, 1974: 136).

The astute use of alternative and adjoining discourses can subtly realign meanings and understandings (6.8), without any need for conscious thought or reason , so that *"a dominant pattern of relations is challenged by another"* (Douglas, 1979: 98). Humour can be understood as the simultaneous expression of competing discourses, *"subject matter upon which we have two contrasted or conflicting attitudes of feeling"* (Eastman, 1939: 224). Humour is often fostered by the ambiguity inherent in all discursive structures, an interstitial space (Gabriel, 2000) with no gate keeper, where any discursive resource that produces a power effect can change the meaning of structural texts (5.3).

8.4.7 Plurivocal

Humour is alive in the moment, providing unlimited opportunities to reinterpret the dominant discourses that constitute reality, *"humour does not by itself create meanings, but rather plays off them, using the meanings previously implicit to present a novel which means both more and less that what it overtly expresses"* (Fine, 1984: 93). Members constructed humour as a way to shift the emphasis and priority of dominant discourses (5.3) (Giddens, 1976). Jokes, anecdotes and laughter acted as a:

> *"....constant reminder of the existence of the logical order as the perfect goal of actuality.... humour continually insists upon the limitations of all experience and of all actuality.... making vivid and immediate the fact that contradictions exist"* (Feibleman, 1949: 81).

This was evident in humour that targeted the arbitrary nature of rules (5.6) and in jokes focusing on socialism (6.9). Humour creates an intrinsically plural dialogue, where implications and views are intentionally blurred and diffuse with meaning, *"the most common of contrasts is between the real and ideal, between what is and what ought to be"* (Bergson, 1956: 142). Members spoke about being influenced by other peoples humour (6.7) and constructing shared perceptions through laughter (6.6) and ironic looks of agreement (7.8): *"The notion of plurivocity, that there are multiple meanings, is very empowering, because it gives organizational participants considerable flexibility to create their own interpretation of what is going on"* (Thachankary, 1992: 231).

Dominant discourses compete for space, feeding ambiguities and contradictions, so that the potential for humour is almost limitless. This provides an opportunity for the charismatic, the idiosyncratic, the individual to present discourse in a way that changes others' sense of things in that moment (6.3) (Bakhtin, 1986). Members constructed humour as a *"diagnostic tool that fostered the spread of common understandings within the [community]"* (Rhodes and Brown, 2005: 171). For example, members utilised "funny" stories to constitute implicit understandings and experiences (5.9). Humour was constructed to provide an element of command, control and artfulness that engaged others' imagination (6.3). Metaphors, understatement, irony and other rhetorical techniques were stock in trade (Oswick, Putnam and Keenoy, 2004), providing a shift in perspective that allowed others to take ownership through communal understandings promoted by shared laughter and mirth (Fineman, 2000).

This reading examined how humour fluidly merges and shapes discourses, allowing meanings to become fluid and transforming. Members talked about being influenced by humour and constructed it as a resource to re-emphasise discourses and constitute new perspectives, a language game of discipline (Boje, 1995: 1031) that influenced interactions and relationships. Members constructed games of truth (Mumby, 2001: 594) that shaped how dominant discourses were interpreted and talked about drawing on the "power in" humour to shape perspectives and beliefs (Giddens, 1976). This process was polyvocal and empowering, allowing participants to dynamically interact with dominant discourses in concert with others (Thachankary, 1992: 231).

8.5 Structure and Agency Reading

8.5.1 Introduction

This section examines structure and agency at the Coop to discuss how *"intersubjective structures of meaning [were] produced, reproduced and transformed through the ongoing communicative activities of its members"* (Mumby, 2001: 585). A perspective that draws on the views of Clegg (1975, 1989) to construct an account of humour in organizations that recognises the inherent tensions in the stabilizing influences of dominant discourses and discrete personal narratives, to construct humour as a mode of influence that fluidly bridges the desire to embrace dominant perspectives, while maintaining a degree of individuality (7.3)[44]. Dominant discourses discipline meaning and maintain regimes of truth (Foucault, 1990), but these patterns of normative influence are never stable; are often ambiguous and can provide space for humour to influence the ways discourse is fostered and interpreted (Giddens, 1984):

> *"....what people laugh at any given time can reveal what they perceive socially, what they are interested in, concerned about, amused by, disgusted with, preoccupied with"* (Hertzler, 1970: 58-59 quoted in Davis, 1993: 2).

Shared humour *"anchored [members] and provided the confidence for further exploration"*, so that while individuals located themselves within dominant discourses, there were other sources of influence available to them (Sluss and Ashforth, 2007: 21). Shared humour and laughter often displayed members' sense of incongruity and paradox (5.8), drawing a

44 *"This approach seeks to illustrate and understand the way in which discourses emerge, what gives a discourse its unity and how it functions in practice"* (Carter, et al., 2002: 520).

distinction between ideologies and reality (Davis, 1993: 102). When an individual comprehends ambiguity and incongruity, then in that moment, something vital has occurred (Bergson, 1988), reality has become active and dynamic, providing the opportunity and impetus for change (Clegg, 1989)[45].

8.5.2 Structure

Humour was constructed by members as an inclusive force within relationships, demonstrating how dominant discourses on mutuality and reciprocation informed "principles and beliefs" (Bergson, 1911) and constituted humour that appeared to support and maintain these dominant positions (5.7). Humour built and maintained a sense of solidarity between individuals (7.8), often fostering talk of social cohesion by members who shaped and were in turn shaped by dominant discourses at the Coop (Holmes, 2000)[46]. For example, discourses on socialism allowed members to construct ambivalent attitudes towards rules and structures (6.9) and draw on discourses that reinterpreted and subtly altered the meaning of cooperation (5.3). Members created "bisociations" through humour, with jokes, perspectives and juxtapositions operating between associative contexts (Koestler, 1974), so that while *"devised to meet particular occasions, comedy outlives them by appealing to broad universals"* (Levin, 1987: 5).

Dominant discourses govern perceptions, creating a sense of coherence and permanence (Foucault, 1991). However, these prevailing discourses also provide texture for humour, creating a vital resource for incongruence and mirth (Giddens, 1976). Humour strengthened and maintained prevailing perspectives, while adding new substance and meaning (Zijderveld, 1968) (5.8). Humorous discourse twists and turns rhetoric, sometimes creating dominant discourses that acted to inform opinion (5.5). Humour can *"reveal the stakes of dominant ideologies by reducing their lofty status"* (Champagne, 1990: 179) through *"the maintenance of paradoxical states of understanding, by permitting recognition of fundamental contradiction without loss of social balance"* (Hatch and Ehrlich, 1993: 524). This reinterpretation and juxtaposition of discourses created organizational change and allowed new discourses to become dominant in the construction of relations of power (5.2). Humour affirmed views and understandings particular to organizational insiders, while creating

45 *"….the poet is a satirist when he takes as subject…. the contrast between reality and the ideal…. the real as imperfection is opposed to the ideal, considered as the highest reality"* (Schiller, 1964: 307).

46 *"As natural and spontaneous as it [humour] sometimes appears; it is closely related to the values dominant in a particular society"* (Zijderveld, 1968: 295).

opportunities to reframe discourses in order to comprehend irony and incongruity (5.9). These humorous scripts grew so common place within myriads of conversations (Raskin, 1985) that they became universal frames of reference (Goffman, 1974).

8.5.3 Community

The Coop was an organization reproduced through association, rather than a dissociative hierarchical power structure. However, there was still a degree of tension between an associative community (that valued flexibility and equality) and the need for governance through organizational structure (that was often constructed as rigid and controlling). This paradox opened up space for humour that subsumed community (Rappaport, 2000), providing opportunities to engage with discourses in ways that transformed the dominant position. For example, discourses on the need for flexibility modified dominant perspectives (5.5) (Giddens, 1984), while providing a resource that constituted autonomy, affiliation, relatedness and acceptance (Lakin and Mahoney, 2006). Members also drew on a wide range of social influences in order to distort discourses by re-emphasising what they believed important to cooperation (5.3):

> *"Humour brings out the discrepancy between the clearly articulated social structure ideally presumed by social norms and the ambiguous incongruous social structure…. encountered in social interaction"* (Davis, 1993: 282).

While organizationally sanctioned discourses dominated, these were never static and were often reinterpreted through the naturalization of discourse (Giddens, 1979). For example, the story of squad leaders reinterpreting cooperation in order to share their work shifts provided a resource for humour (5.3). While meanings and attitudes are disciplined and immersed in relations of power, humour is also empowered by pleasure, desire and choice (Dixon, 2011). Humour became an *"apt symbol for expressing community in this sense"* (Douglas, 1979: 104). For example, humour often subordinated mechanistic forms of rules and structure in favour of community relationships founded on autonomy (5.6). Humour formed *"part of the ongoing process which is only partly organized in the wider social structure. Whereas structure is differentiated and channels authority through the system, in the context of community, roles are ambiguous…. community in this sense has positive values associated with it; good fellowship, spontaneity, warm contact…. as expressing the value of community as against structure"* (Douglas, 1979:104).

8.5.4 Agency

Humour and laughter provided resources for members to connect in interesting and dynamic ways (7.8) and became a medium through which people interacted with structures, constituting a resource for social change (Clegg *et al*., 2006: 120). Humour conveys distinctiveness and oneness, individuality and conformity, *"while allowing for blurring, multiplicity and dynamism"* (Albert, Ashforth and Dutton, 2000: 13), weaving claims on reality into a network of competing and incongruous frames of reference that provide space within relations of power to pause and consider alternatives (Rhodes, 2001). In that moment change becomes a possibility, qualified and vested through mirth:

> *"....affection, tenderness, friendship, fidelity, camaraderie . . . things that our rather sanitized society can't allow a place for without fearing the formation of new alliances and the tying together of unforeseen lines of force. . . . These relations introduce love where there's supposed to be only law, rule, or habit"* (Foucault, 1994: 136-137).

Ambiguity and contradictions allowed members to find humour within even the most dominant discourses, *"[separating] the joints of the seemingly seamless social structure, making them visible"* (Davis, 1993: 313) and providing a jumping-off point, where those things that once appeared "concrete" began to feel less substantiated. This was evident in humour that targeted members who enforced rules that many constructed as mutable (5.6) and in insider jokes that articulated the social boundaries maintained through dominant discourse, so that members were able to perceive their identities within the organization as distinct from their views in other environments (7.4). Humour and laughter can come to represent our propensity to retain alternative perspectives in relation to others (7.7), a desire that *"is both our fate and our freedom; a cause and a consequence: nature and culture inseparably mingled"* (Starkey and Hatchuel, 2002: 653), allowing incongruence, ambivalence and ambiguity to take hold through the assimilation of competing discourses (6.9).

Dominant discourses that constructed *"relations of resistance"* (Scott, 1990: 45), offered the opportunity to comment on and critique the environment through the *"exploration and exposition of possibilities"* (Rhodes, 2001: 383). Rather than open rebellion, humour reflected the limitless possibility of language to cloud, weaken and transplant prevailing perspectives. Members constructed humour in ways that demonstrate knowledge is not a given, it is alive, reflexive and often transforming (Gephart, 1992):

> *"….as if a man should neglect himself and treat his shadow on the wall with marks of infinite respect…. the multiplication of multiple wants and expenses in civilised life and the exaggeration of all trifling forms, present innumerable occasions for this discrepancy to expose itself"* (Emerson, 1946: 212).

Humour constituted members ability to shape meaning and could be understood as a "dialectical phenomenology" (Davis, 1993) that allowed members to participate in the creation and adoption of discrete points of view (7.7), blurring boundaries and creating agency (Collinson, 2004). Members talked about humour unlocking and automating unconscious outlooks retained from previous experiences (7.5), revealing idiosyncrasies and the id's relation to the Other (Freud, 1928). Participants recognised that their perspectives were mutable and seduced by dominant discourses, but simultaneously constructed humour as a form of resistance (6.8) that did not require consent or even support. Agency occurred through meaning making discourses situated in and constituted through humour, *"because mundane, serious discourse simply cannot cope with its own interpretive multiplicity"* (Mulkay, 1988: 214).

Humour requires structure to shape interactions and is often found at the intersection of discourse (Davis, 1993), where *"the creation of a subtle joke and the recreative act of perceiving the joke involve the delightful mental jolt of a sudden leap from one plane or associative context to another* (Koestler, 1974: 6). In moments of mirth, a new and dynamic association often lingers, giving those who experience that feeling pause to consider their position going forward (5.5). The essence of humour lies in the unexpected, *"achieved through the breaking of frames, where normal expectations are transgressed, yet where the broken frame is assumed rather than articulated"* (Rhodes, 2001: 381). It is this dichotomy that allowed humour to thrive and entrench itself, sometimes altering and establishing dominant ways of thinking (7.2) (Giddens, 1984). Humour seamlessly merges "the agency of human action" (Albert, Ashforth and Dutton, 2000) within multiple frames of reference, promoting and contradicting collective discourses, allowing individuals *"to snap, with wit and grace, the bonds that bind us, if only for a short time"* (Orme, 1986: 14).

8.5.5 Vignette (No. 7) Considered

Organizational texts that discussed the importance of the collective, mutuality, group cohesion and trust provided impetus for humour to become a natural and reoccurring mode of influence that provided pleasure, mirth and meaning to our interactions (Dixon, 2011). In Vignette (No. 7) we put our *"structurally formed capacities to work in creative or innovative ways... transforming the very structures that give us the capacity to act"* (Sewell, 1992: 4). By creating a *"certain ironic distance"* (Ashforth, 2001: 81), we affect an ambivalent outlook that acts as a tipping-point to create and maintain space for alternative views (Fleming and Spicer, 2003). It is possible to construct these discourses as static or frozen in time, rather than an actual continuation of the processes that led to certain discourses becoming dominant at the Coop. Humour and laughter connected members (7.8), allowing *"the efficacy of human action"* (Sewell, 1992: 2) to become *"both the medium and the outcome of the practices which constitute social systems"* (Giddens 1981: 27). Humour does not stand outside of dominant discourses, so that agency is situational and still reflective of power/knowledge relationships. By providing a certain distance from our situation, humour realigned our rhetoric and perspectives in ways that did not simply challenge normative texts. The focus was also inward, attention falling on ourselves:

> *"....only one who stands outside of all order can make the symbols of the order ridiculous"* (Zucker, 1969: 78).

By creating "an air of ambivalence" we provided ourselves with the space to connect through alternative discourses. The resulting humour that characterised our interactions allowed us to forge connections through shared sentiments (Boje, 1995), constructed as *"a play upon form. It [humour] brings into relation disparate elements in such a way that one accepted pattern is challenged by the appearance of another which in some way was hidden in the first"* (Douglas, 1979: 96). For example, rules and beliefs were juxtaposed in order to make comic an imaginary infraction and this pattern of thinking provided an *"infinite play of differences in meanings mediated through socially constructed hegemonic practices"* (Boje, 1995: 998) that allowed us to presuppose dominant discourses and expose them as contingent to reflection, critique and change (Mumby, 2009: 320).

To conclude, this reading explored the dynamic interrelation of structure and agency, positioning humour as a resource through which members' maintained and re-interpreted dominant discourses (Giddens, 1984). To provide a perspective, focusing on the indeterminacy

inherent in all discourses (Lyotard, 1984), *"humour recognises the random, ironic, incongruent aspects of life…. personal contradictions are not just there, but provide the disruption of any attempt to simply centre and give endless tasks of resolution"* (Deetz, 2005: 103). Humour can come to reflect the exploration of mutual perceptions and attitudes, evident in members talk about connecting with others through humour, creating a sense of solidarity that guided attitudes and desires (Dixon, 2011). Humour reflects the inherent incongruity and ambiguity within dominant discourses and can be understood as an exercise in power that plays with language, providing opportunities to modify patterns of power/knowledge (Foucault, 1977).

9. My Reflections as Researcher

9.1 Introduction

This chapter is designed to provide a degree of transparency, by placing myself into the final write-up (Easterby-Smith *et al*., 2008) and recognises that *"the reflexive researcher acknowledges his or her identity as a participant in the research and confesses any "sins", in terms of personal interests or rhetorical manoeuvrings"* (Alvesson, *et al*., 2008: 488). From the conception of my thesis, I had always envisioned my research taking place in a corporate office in London. This would have built on my own experiences over the course of my career. I expected to find competition amongst peers spilling over into banter and put downs; managers utilizing humour in ways that emphasised hierarchy and subordinates establishing discrete outlooks that differed from those prescribed by the corporation. I was wilfully taking these preconceptions into my site of inquiry (Suddaby, 2006). However, the Coop allowed me to re-examine the ways that organizational members engage with each other, in ways that proved subtle and interesting. When a participant said that the Coop isn't a place where you see or hear much humour, it deflated me and led me to doubt whether I had chosen a suitable organization. This motivated me to start researching the organization in more detail and my engagement with news coverage, comedy shows and organizational texts allowed new themes and ideas to emerge in unexpected ways.

My research interviews, observations and interactions allowed me to re-examine myself; my feelings and sense of structure, so that I came to realise I had reinvented myself in the field and had grown as an individual (Reinharz, 1997). Humour often places things under a microscope and allows people to view things from a different perspective and this reflects my research experience, providing an important metaphor for how enacting research shapes and

twists viewpoints. I came to understand that I cared deeply about becoming a productive ethnographer and had a desire to produce research that transcended what I thought I could produce going in. Whether I achieved great work was not what was at stake, rather, it was something more important to the method; it was my sense of integrity, coherence and personal growth (Humphreys *et al.*, 2003). These ultimately inform your interpretations, making them more personal, authentic and meaningful.

9.2 Becoming a Member

My wife joined the Coop after moving to Brooklyn in January 2011. I didn't join her in the United States until after fulfilling my commitments in the UK, and had listened with interest about this unique and famous New York Institution. I could see the many benefits of carrying out my research there; extensive media coverage; a large membership; strong organizational identity; an interesting management dynamic; access would mean I could start data collection soon after arriving in America; the organization was situated in our neighbourhood and would help provide a network of friends and insiders.

9.2.1 The Orientation

When you arrive in the evening, the office is winding down, with only a handful of staff present and the floor lacks the energy I came to appreciate during the day. Maybe, it was this, maybe it was the collection of joining members that I instantly decided I had little in common with, or maybe it was a sense that this was not the "right" organization for my research, but I felt apprehensive and disconnected. This was not helped when we were asked to introduce ourselves, explain how we had heard of the Coop and describe why we were joining. It is in my nature to get these formalities out of the way quickly, so I immediately decided not to mention my thesis and to keep my answer short. The French woman before me explained "we have the most marvellous produce markets in my country and I haven't been able to find the same quality here in New York," and on that pretence, I bluffly answered that I was joining "because the prices were cheaper". I was pleasantly surprised that this met with nodding approval from the member carrying out our induction[47]. The orientation was a very serious affair, with countless rules and their antecedents explained, so that by the time we had been shown around and signed up for our shifts, I had not been able to engage with anyone with any genuine humour or intimacy and left wondering if members were a little too earnest, serious and health conscious for my nature and how this would effect my ability to research humour and laughter, with the theoretical perspectives I was bringing into the inquiry.

47 *"The main motivators for our group that morning were eating healthy, and access to good quality food that's also cheap. One girl explained that she has food intolerances and finds it easier to take care of them at the Food Coop. Others were looking for a greater sense of community. Yet another guy admitted he was lured in by the smell of spices, vegetable and fruit. It reminded him of his childhood stores, since most of our supermarkets nowadays don't smell at all" (*Online Magazine, The Treehugger: How perfect is the Park Slope Food Coop? 02/04/2010).

9.2.2 Access

On joining the Coop, I asked about the possibility of carrying out my study there and was encouraged to hear that other members had researched the organization. After working two shifts outside, walking grocery carts back to the store, I worked my first shift in the office and was introduced to one of the General Coordinators. She was very positive about my research focus and epistemology, so we arranged a meeting to discuss whether I could have access. The meeting went well and it was agreed that I could work shifts on the Future Time Off Program (FTOP) in order to begin my participant observation, write field notes and interview full time and volunteer members. There were only a small number of provisos; that I respected the Coop's rules; did not disrupt member work squads; interviewed members outside of the Coop and was sensitive to members' privacy. I was free to take field notes and to speak with members about my research while I worked and it was through early conversations about my thesis, that I met members who were willing to donate their time to my initial interviews.

9.3 As Organizational Participant

I spent a significant amount time on site, from January 2012 to July 2012, working between twenty and thirty hours each week. After this period, I continued to work shifts as a member and spoke to informal contacts throughout my write up. This helped enable me to ensure that I gave others a voice in my texts, and this process continued right up until I returned and completed my thesis in the UK. The *"sizeable amount of on-site observation"* (Prasad, 1997: 102) meant that some of the members I worked with became friends and these acquaintances have added a great deal of perspective to my ideas. Other members discussed my ideas while we worked, providing important dialogue and counterpoints that helped shape my thinking and in so doing, advanced my theories and interpretations (Weick, 2001). On reflection, the social nature of the Coop provided many rich encounters, affording a heuristic and complex account of organizational life, complete with idiosyncrasies and contradictions (Golden-Biddle & Locke, 1993).

I worked across the organization; on check out; cash registers; food processing; bulk stocking; receiving and in the office. There was a critical period where I gained confidence and started to feel at home in the organization and this was buoyed by the monthly cycle, which meant I was working with the same people again, providing some level of familiarity. Members were interested in my thesis and many found it funny that I was researching humour at the Coop, which made for some interesting interactions. For example, I was discussing my research with a member who was working next to me on checkout, after being introduced as a researcher by

someone I had worked with previously. When she discovered I was researching humour, she laughed and said “the Coop creates the perfect petri dish for people who take themselves too seriously to flourish”. This insight reminded me of Bergson’s (1911) position, on how people laugh at the rigidity of others, providing me with a key reflection point that opened up a rich seam of data and proved extremely rewarding. Other members told me stories that shaped my understandings and framed my theories and interpretations going forward.

After grounding myself in the organization for three months, I decided to concentrate my time on the shifts where I had experienced the most humour and laughter and so began two distinct periods of interaction, where I worked mainly in food processing, followed by the office. These squads were excellent sites of inquiry, because they featured a group of members working in close proximity, many of whom had worked together for a long period. Both groups are very social and offered different sub-cultures. For example, the office is coordinated by full-time members and there is a tangible sense of what the rules and procedures are for each query and action. There are manuals, procedures and experienced staff on hand to field questions. This provided a strong sense of structure and continuity. The atmosphere in food processing is very different, with each shift operating in varied ways, often due to the different approaches of the volunteer squad leaders and the character of their teams. Food processing operates two floors away from the office, where the organization’s structures are most tangible and many of the members feel more comfortable in this informal atmosphere, defined by friendships, conversations and a degree of autonomy.

9.3.1 Early Impressions

The music playing around the store; the chatty person on the entrance desk; the lack of any uniforms; members returning their own shopping baskets to the front door; receivers restocking the cabinets whenever you walk in; shoppers inquiring over the intercom, *“do we have any more unsulfured dried apricots?”* (New York Times: Flunking Out at the Food Coop, 25/10/2009). These are all some of the indicators that this is no ordinary grocery store. A sense of community suffuses the premises; *“everybody is chatting with everyone, a lot of people know each other and even if they don't, they still comment on the stuff in your shopping cart”* (Treehugger.com: How perfect is the Park Slope Food Coop? 04/02/2010). Non-members have mistakenly walked in thinking they can shop at the Coop and experienced this sense of community:

> *“Someone came in and went up to a woman who was stocking shelves, and said "excuse me, do you work here?" Everyone turned around and were like "how did*

> *you get in? Who are you? What do you mean, does she work here? Everyone works here, how can you not know that? You are not supposed to be in here". This poor woman was so overwhelmed by it. Somehow, she had managed to get through without having to scan a membership card"* (Alex, Volunteer Member, Food Processing).

The organization is very different to any I had experienced and I was a little intimidated at how comfortable other members were in these unaccustomed surrounds. For example, one day I was working on the express line and was checking out a lady who had lost the membership receipt provided at the front desk for someone who does not have their card. This meant that after scanning her items, she could not pay (to prevent suspended members shopping) and had to go back to the front desk and get another receipt. I waited patiently for her to return, listening to the music being played over the intercom system, by one of the members on the front desk. As she returned she started to dance and sing to the song currently playing, doing a full pirouette, before brandishing the new receipt with a flourish. On reflection, her acting out was funny, but at the time I felt embarrassed. This woman was not crazy; rather she felt comfortable enough in the Coop to act unabashed. My sense of embarrassment stemmed from the realization that I did not feel as at ease and that this might be apparent to other members. If I laughed, it was simply to save face (Goffman, 1967).

On another occasion, during one of my first shopping trips, I needed some fresh coriander to make dinner[48]. There was none on the shelf, so I asked a receiver who was stocking, whether there was any in the basement. He kindly insisted that I page my query out over the intercom. My assertion that it wasn't a problem was promptly disregarded and I found myself practically frog-marched over to a phone and bashfully broadcasting my request over the entire store. I could swear I heard the sound of laughter, as I bumbled out a semi coherent question, through mumbling lips, my forehead sweating profusely. Later that night, my wife and I ate fresh coriander salsa with our dinner, while I made a mental note to never ask a receiver if we had any items in storage going forward.

This sense of unease was increased by the realization that I was now an organizational researcher, trying to gain valuable insights, in an unfamiliar cultural landscape, that did not resemble any of my preconceived notions concerning the organization that I would be

48 To put this story into perspective; in my subsequent time working in the office, I have had members who know me, come up from the shopping floor to joke and laugh at me, after hearing my voice paging out over the address system. I have always felt somewhat self-conscious about my strong accent. I once provided a reading at a friend's wedding and was later told by members of the congregation, that they thought my delivery was extremely funny, because of my gruff London accent.

researching. I am not a nervous character and am at ease meeting new people and experiencing different situations, but it wasn't long before I started to feel my left eye twitching whenever I stepped into the store. Other members could connect to these feelings, and it was clear that on joining, many of us were faced with a similar period of adjustment; such is the uniqueness of the atmosphere. Subsequently, I came to the conclusion, that when we eventually returned to the UK, I would probably miss the Coop more than anything else. It is an inspirational place, replete with characters at every turn. I found a lack of cynicism that benefited my research immeasurably and I believe that this can be partially attributed to the cooperative nature of the venture rubbing off on members, many of whom, like me, found instant connections with others through humour and laughter. For example, there are stereotypical member identities and people tend to laugh when someone fits the picture:

> *"….if the spirit of an earnest, sweet-natured, somewhat bossy counterculture lives on in the new century, it probably lives in Park Slope, Brooklyn, and its spiritual epicenter is undoubtedly the food coop"* (New York Times: Tie-Dyed Food, 21/4/2002).

I admit that I have been influenced by these stereotypes and that they have shaded my perceptions and feelings at times. However, they also offered important insights into how members disassociated themselves from being pigeon-holed through humour and critique. It wasn't long before I decided that humorous comments found in the media had an important influence within the organization. This perspective turned-in on itself (Knights and McCabe, 2003) and helped provide ideas, materials and new approaches to data collection that resulted in some exciting perspectives and understandings (Schatzmann and Strauss, 1973). For example, one member was an actress in an internet comedy series set in Park Slope and had featured the Coop in a 10 minute skit. This provided me with an important theme; examining how rules and structures appear to take precedence over relationships and how this is can be highly amusing. I eventually met the actress and her interview provided me with the back story to the clip and her perspectives on the content. This allowed me to re-examine my literature review, providing a change of emphasis, which fleshed out rather abstract positions, making them concrete, in a way that was surprising and extremely rewarding:

> *"….the source of certain ideas, or even models, can come from sources other than data. The biographies of scientists are replete with stories of occasional flashes of insight, of seminal ideas, garnered from sources outside the data"* (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 6).

With no similar experiences or personal reference points to fall back on, I felt like the savage from Aldous Huxley's novel, Brave New World, who comes into the organization bright eyed, but uncomfortably in awe of the community, identity and solidarity he finds there. Nagging doubts remained throughout the first few weeks that I did not fit-in. This organization was going to allow me to become a professional academic and with that came a degree of respect and excitement. However, I was an outsider; an autonomous and resourceful person, with *"enduring characteristics of individuality"* (Billig, 2005: 12)[49], always looking for a private way out; through joking and laughing with other members; in the observations I found funny and through the amusing stories I later told friends, many of whom were also members. Throughout my life, I have always attempted to connect with others through humour. However, my predisposition to laugh at the things around me can be understood as an ego defence and I acknowledge that I often attempt to convince myself that I am impervious to the *"arrows of reality" (Freud, 1928: 220)*. However, as I became more comfortable in my surroundings, I was able to cast aside preconceptions and my natural inclination to respond with humour (O'Connell, 1976) and in so doing, began to give in to the Other.

9.4 A Natural Inquisition

This naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) was to some extent shaped by my inclination to connect with others who share my sense of humour. Therefore, this has been at the outset, an inquiry from the inside (Evered and Louis, 1981). I am someone that others believe has a good sense of humour. Many of my acquaintances have a more refined sense of humour than me and this has rubbed off, in a way that is apparent to others. As a reflexive researcher, this opinion of myself worried me; after all, I wanted to avoid an egotistical, narcissistic account, not least because boring others is not in my nature (Suddaby, 2006: 635). I spent some time considering whether I had some measure of *"practical wisdom"* (Flyvbjerg, 2001); the street smarts, wit and critical eye for seeing when something is said in jest; is "funny"; reflects that person's outlook, or is simply said for the fun of it. I am someone who will "throw something out there", confident that if it falls flat, I can move on unfazed. Is there a sweeter pleasure, knowing that you said something funny, in a situation where others decide to withhold their laughter and watch while they struggle to contain themselves? If humour is a trait, then it is one I have spent a great deal of time honing, so that I now laugh frequently, and often try to keep humorous interactions going with an encouraging word, or a witty retort.

49 *"He's being sent to a place where he'll meet the most interesting set of men and women to be found anywhere in the world. All the people who, for one reason or another, have got too self-consciously individual to fit into community-life. All the people who aren't satisfied with orthodoxy, who've got independent ideas of their own. Every one, in a word, who's any one. I almost envy you, Mr. Watson"* (Huxley, Brave New World, 2007: 155).

I think of my sense of humour as a life project; I have constantly worked on myself to smooth away the rough edges, so that I can laugh at things, that once I found upsetting.

I appreciate that this project was and is self-enhancing and that at times it is driven by my ego. I tend to swerve from selfishly joking at the expense of others, unless I am confident that they rather enjoy it and have made many friends after sharing banter on our first meeting. I think it is perfectly natural to joke at another person's expense and often learn a great deal about an individual's character with a gentle bit of prodding. Likewise, I always respond positively to the light hearted jibes of others and understand that in some way, this reveals less of me. I admit that there are times that I do not enjoy someone joking at my expense, but these moments are rare and are often sparked by the joke being wide of the mark in some way, so that I do not recognise myself[50]. The criticism found in banter helps me to keep my feet on the ground and I have learnt a great deal about myself through the jokes that friends share about me[51]. I am someone, who on occasion, encourages others to joke at my expense and enjoy leaving myself "wide open" in the company of companions who are willing to take advantage of the opportunity; often interpreting their jokes as a backwards compliment (Terrion and Ashforth, 2002). I owe my sense of irony and ability to take a joke to my Mother, who was someone who loved light hearted teasing and to poke fun at anyone with an air of superiority. I have long recognised that her jokes were a kind of power play (Billig, 2005) and this demonstrates the contradictory nature of humour, an important and fluid dialect within social spaces.

As I embarked on my PhD it never occurred to me that I would carry out my research outside the UK, so when my wife took a job in New York and it was decided that I would look for an organization there to carry out my ethnography, I was nervous about the consequences this would have for my research. Humour is predicated on the prominent outlooks, understandings and manners of that culture and so it would be important to comprehend what makes Americans laugh and why. A thought shared by one of my examiners, who raised the question during my transfer viva from MPhil to PhD. I had travelled in the USA and grown up watching American comedy sitcoms, many of which were set in New York. In my travels, I had found Americans to be polite and friendly, but I expected the humour in New York to be more aggressive; more forthright; more critical and talked about how this would be relevant to my

50 *"The wit makes fun of other persons; the satirist makes fun of the world; the humourist makes fun of himself, but in so doing, he identifies himself with people—that is, people everywhere, not for the purpose of taking them apart, but simply revealing their true nature"* (James Thurber, 1864-1961).

51 *"The very purpose of existence is to reconcile the glowing opinion we have of ourselves with the appalling things that other people think about us"* (Quentin Crisp, 1908-1999).

research interests. As it turned out, I was somewhat mistaken:

> *"….here [in New York], it seems to me that the function of humour is more of a disarming mechanism, rather than overt hostility, antagonism or aggression"* (Chris, Volunteer Member, Shopping).

In a city famous for the somewhat aggressive nature of its inhabitants, my favourite kinds of humorous interactions, namely banter, good natured teasing, light sarcasm and understated put downs were not overly abundant. Many of the city's inhabitants have arrived as adults from other locations across the states and the world, with many reserving banter for close friends and family. I came to learn this through trial and error, probing and testing others, looking for the inside track. I quickly came to understand that personal criticism of any kind can lead to shock or anger and not just from the intended target, but also from anyone who happens to be listening:

> ***"****I had a problem when I first came here [New York]. British humour and American humour can be incredibly different and sometimes, what we [English people] find is funny is incredibly offensive to Americans. I had to figure out what that balance was and not just shoot it [humour] off. That is where you can get yourself into trouble, just shooting off [humour]. I've learned over the years what is appropriate and what is not, but I still sometimes mess up and people take me seriously"* (Milla, Full Time Coordinator).

Most of the New Yorkers that I met used irony to get their point across, but there was a different set of cultural rules in play, *"we British use irony a little more often than our special friends in the US. It's like the kettle to us: it's always on, whistling slyly in the corner of our daily interactions. To Americans, however, it's more like a nice teapot, something to be used when the occasion demands it. This is why an ironic comment will sometimes be met with a perplexed smile by an unwary American"* (Simon Pegg, in a Guardian article, 10 February 2007). Americans are not so much worse at irony as better at sincerity, which took me some time to get used to. Where New Yorkers differ from other Americans is that they feel no need to mask their displeasure or to exercise any restraint in telling you what they think of your opinion. Confronted with an angry New Yorker it doesn't really help to explain, listen here old bean, we English are *"conceived in irony. We float in it from the womb. It's the amniotic fluid… joking but not joking. Caring but not caring. Serious but not serious"* (Alan Bennett, quoted in Fox, 2004: 65). New Yorkers are often demonstrative and not embarrassed to show their emotions, or to "call-you-out" with an "arsehole". So I "tip-toed" around people for a while,

until I found a more natural rhythm, still enjoying moments of banter and understatement, but with a selective audience of close friends and known acquaintances, while enjoying the more straight forward approach of many of the members I encountered.

I admit that I was guilty of engaging in too many conversations that had no bearing on my research, rather than attempting to foster conversations of purpose (Burgess, 1984: 102). If I had been less self-conscious, I would have been able to record many interesting narratives and often lacked the courage to place my audio recorder on the table while we talked. However, I also found that once the microphone was placed on the table, people who had previously been very talkative often began to feel uncomfortable and the conversation became stilted. For example, as members in food processing became more comfortable with me as researcher, I decided to ask them to participate in focus groups, to stimulate discussions, while we worked bagging goods. No one had appeared concerned about me writing down field notes or discussing my thesis with them and I decided that I could extend this to recording conversations. I asked for their permission and no one declined, but on reflection, this was probably out of politeness and the process was unproductive; many members did not want to engage; others tried to derail conversations by talking about something else; there was little to no true discussion; one member talked, while others listened and another member later complained about me. The idea was swiftly abandoned. This set-back allowed me to re-examine how I could record dialogue and I shifted my focus to recording general meetings, where the sound of laughter often revealed views and outlooks, providing me with some interesting material.

I have been drawn to critical management studies throughout my academic life and this is reflected in my ongoing ontological and epistemological positions. When an informant described how there is a culture of anti-authority within the full time staff at the Coop, I was forced to recognise that, because I related to this outlook, I would provide a sympathetic voice to the management efforts at the Coop and that this would resonate with "particular voices" within my field of study (Alvesson, *et al.*, 2008: 492). I often connected with those who shared my mistrust of other member's need for authority, self-righteousness, earnestness and strict adherence to rules and procedures. I am one of many who feel the need to comply on my own terms and this means that people, outlooks and rhetoric come in shades of grey, open to interpretation and a candidate for humour where ever possible:

"There is something Pagan in me that I cannot shake off. In short, I deny nothing, but doubt everything" (Lord Byron, 1788-1824).

The multifaceted approach of my epistemology, in many ways mirrors my personal interaction with the organization and its structures. In my search for "the Other", I have identified with the many structural elements that fit my own world view, while understating discourses that shape other people's perceptions. So that, while I have tried extremely hard to pay attention to the views of my interviewees; to comprehend and internalize what it is to be "a member" in order to better inform my interpretations and explored viable sources of data collection to elicit the implicit understandings of others, I cannot claim to understand the Coop in the same way as my informants (Van Maanen, 1979: 542).

I felt unsettled by the amount of time I spent reflecting on what I had observed and how I should capture my experiences and interpretations (Clarke *et al*., 2009). I faced nagging uncertainties throughout the process, a feeling that I could be doing something more and that it would effect the overall quality of my research. However, there is always uncertainty within the process and I found great comfort in tacking back and forth between my own research and the supporting literature; realizing that there is an inherent ambiguity in how others have overcome these fears (Humphreys *et al*., 2003: 19). These moments of introspection often provided important insights into how I could improve my method (Cassell *et al*., 2009: 520). For example, I worried that my decision to concentrate field notes on funny stories, anecdotes and comments, meant that my focus was too narrow, and that it was possible I was missing important details. This led to me re-examining my coding and themes, so that certain stories and jokes took on a new relevance; influencing my research focus and interview schedules. I had been focussing on my participants talk on humour as resistance, but on reflection I came to realise that this discourse appeared structured in some way. I began to re-interpret and re-structure my data in meaningful ways. I came to realize that dominant discourses restricted the type of humour being used and that much of the laughter was based around irony and in-jokes, often not requiring any verbal comment. This allowed me to expand the focus of my field notes and add important discussion points to my interview plans (helping me to overcome my anxieties).

After spending a considerable amount of time in the organization, I reflected on my own perspectives and how I had given in "to the other" (Wolff, 1964), fitting in with the many members who identify strongly with the structures and values of the organization. I had determined what the rules of engagement were and this had shaped my own perspectives, so that meanings were partially derived from my dialogue with the organizations norms, values and rhetoric (Watson, 1994). This gradual process of internalization provided tacit knowledge, so that my own feelings and attitudes (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005: 6) helped to specify the ways in which humour and laughter helped facilitate social meaning at the Coop (Gubrium and Holstein, 2003: 215).

This was facilitated by my interaction with the literature on humour, power and identities, so that I began to see humour through a theoretical prism, almost blind to other interpretations. Ethnographic work can in part, be likened to a method actor learning their role; as researcher, I climbed into the skin of my theoretical positions (2.8). This involved pushing other explanations and perspectives aside, so that I no longer viewed humour and laughter as positive or negative. Rather, I perceived them as integral to views and outlooks; suffused with power; reshaping and presenting insights in subtle and discrete ways. It was rewarding to hear an interviewee agree with an insight and exclaim they had never viewed humour from that perspective; not simply because it boosted my self-esteem, but because it demonstrated I had embraced my theoretical perspectives (2.8) and in-so-doing had reshaped my sense of self in important ways that impacted the quality of my research. This conceptual rhythm (Geertz, 1983: 69) provided a natural focus, so that in many ways my theoretical propositions are not after the fact and in retrospect (Weick, 1999: 135). Rather, they are how I interpret humour and laughter in the everyday. In short, my views and outlooks on humour have changed, due to the structure provided by my engagement with the literature. This "theoretical sensitivity" (Glaser, 1978) came to light, as I listened to my interview conversations and heard my insights and outlooks appear naturally in conversation.

9.5 The Interview Reflections

It made sense to carry out interviews in the coffee shops that are dotted around the surrounding neighbourhood, as the informal environment was well suited to discussing humour and laughter. However, this proved too much of a distraction for some interviewees; one decided he would like a cake half-way through the conversation, while another kept starting conversations with friends who wandered by during the interview. There was the odd occasion when a person sitting on a nearby table talked so loudly, that we had to retire to another area. One coffee shop closed halfway through the interview and we resumed our conversation on the bench outside. In order to encourage attendance, I endeavoured to meet in a convenient place of their choosing and some shops proved to be fairly noisy. Most owners were happy to turn down the music, but the coffee grinder drowned out the conversation on the odd occasion. While these problems did surface from time to time, most of the interviews went well and took on an informal tone that indicated a certain level of comfort and camaraderie. In most cases, the participants enjoyed speaking; connected to my research; engaged with my perspectives and were willing to speak again in the future.

I initially decided to structure questions around my literature review to ensure that the initial interviews had some theoretical basis. Then, three weeks after starting my participant observation, I left home, walked three blocks and rang the doorbell of my first interview participant. I was relaxed and daydreamed about "how this would go down". As the bell sounded, all sorts of thoughts started to enter my mind. How far from the door should I stand, so as not to come over as pushy? How should a researcher act in this circumstance? I had no idea how to conduct a meeting of this sort and nervously chuckled to myself, wondering if the interviewee would recognise that I was a fraud and had no idea what I was doing. However, I soon fell into my usual relaxed rhythm. I made a conscious note, not to stray from my questions too much and this gave me confidence and maybe the illusion of authority. I was aware that this affected the flow of the conversation and in subsequent interviews I attempted to use the questions more loosely in order to engage more naturally.

While my structured approach provided a sense of cohesion in the early stages, I came to understand that it was important to loosen up and allow interviews to evolve more naturally (Miles and Huberman, 1984: 27). I began to concentrate on emergent themes and allowed interviewees to discuss aspects of the Coop that didn't appear to relate directly to humour and laughter, convinced that what interviewees talked about, would help me construct what was unique about the Coop and how that influenced humour and laughter. There is a balance between having an open conversation, where your participant engages in a meaningful

discussion and sticking to questions that are structured before the interview. If you fire questions in quick succession, the interview starts to feel like an exam; when you allow the participant too much space, the conversation can become unfocused or unimaginative. There is a creative interplay between the structured questions and informal conversation and while I went into each interview with questions gathered under theoretical headings, these acted only as a guide[52]. It was important to allow the interviewee to direct the ebb and flow at times, in order to elicit ideas and insights. In certain interviews, I was able to successfully merge structured questions with informal conversation and this helped establish how an interview should feel and provided a template for monitoring my own input. For example, I began to attempt to speak in shorter bursts, in order to change the conversation in subtle ways (Cassell *et al*., 2009). However, my lack of experience meant that I often attempted to steer the interview, when it would have been better to let the conversation breathe. This may have been a result of insecurity, as there is a certain comfort in establishing oneself as the authority, but it helped me construct a better understanding of the balance between self and other that enhanced future conversations. For example, as I progressed through the initial interviews and began transcribing, it was clear that my lack of experience resulted in me being out of sync at times, so that I missed important cues, where I should have extended the dialogue. Rather than probing further, I was too keen to move on to my next question; as if I was ticking off a list, instead of engaging with what it was interviewees found interesting about humour and laughter. This presented an important point of reflection throughout my time on site and helped me break free of my own insecurities.

One of the benefits of researching the Coop is the educational level of many members. This has many advantages, when trying to present humour in ways that are not more readily understood through wider discourse. Some interviewees had much more experience in interview settings and this lead to me losing control of the process on occasion. Where the interviewee was discussing areas of interest, this did not present a problem, but in some cases it became difficult to licit any answers on humour and laughter and at worst, the interviewee ended up steering the interview and this resulted in me actually answering more of their questions than they did mine. This was not helped by a feeling that I was making things up as I went along. My initial structure had given way to an extremely unstructured style, with multiple fuzzy categories (Silverman, 2000). While this provided my interviewees with more room to manoeuvre, it also left me feeling vulnerable and insecure at times. While interesting, the conversation often strayed from humour and laughter and too much time was spent discussing the organization, rather than humour and laughter itself, so that the interviews often

52 *"Consistency is the last refuge of the unimaginative"* (Oscar Wilde, 1854-1900).

lacked depth and many of the themes I was interested in went untapped. I started to get frustrated with myself, because it was deflating when the transcript strayed and it felt like a waste of time transcribing material that was not relevant or meaningful.

Vignette No. 8 – One Cold Day in January

I head inside, leaving "the freezer" outside, entering through the outer "wind door" that shields the people eating from getting a quick blast of ice-cold air. I am at the "Farm on Flatbush", a short hop from the 2 train, further down the hill at Bergen Street. I push my way through the heavy curtain the other side of the front door and the warm air hits me, slightly taking my breath away. I am immediately greeted by a friendly waiter at the front of house and I wheeze slightly, as I ask for a table and a flat white coffee. My face is still stinging from the wind-chill, as I remove my bobble hat and gloves, peel off a heavy ski-coat and start shedding my double-knit pull-over. The bright winter sunshine and clear skies belie the temperature, it may look inviting, but you need to be prepared….. It is a "balmy" 27 degrees according to weather reports, with a wind-chill of minus 3 and I ponder the need to even draw a distinction, as my lips begin defrosting on the hot cup. I take out my recording device and interview schedule from my man-bag, settling back into my seat with my coffee. It is 1.20pm and I agreed to meet Joan here at half past. The room has high ceilings and old wooden floors. It looks like it has been here as long as some of the brown-stone houses that line the streets of this, my neighbourhood. The table sits in front of the long curved bar, where it ends, the room gives way to 1940's style boxed-in seating. It is the day before the weekend and the room is only half-full, providing a relaxed air and the quiet hum of conversations lends to the ambience. I begin to look forward to the interview and get a good feeling, it is going to go well……

I met Joan while working in Food Processing (Appendices 11.2), where she overheard me explaining to the squad leader that I was an organizational researcher and became interested in my thesis. She had told me at the time that she was a life coach and had recently sent me an email message to say, *"I wanted to let you know about an email series I started recently that might interest you. It is designed to encourage and help you to stop whatever you're doing, for just a moment, and give yourself the gift of going inside to access peace and wisdom"*. Below this was a poem and some advice regarding not allowing perceptual errors to become limiting, *"in my coaching work, true transformation takes place when I am able to help my clients identify the beliefs that are preventing them from moving forward to where and who they want to be…. Are you limiting yourself with beliefs/assumptions that are untested? Who would you be if those assumptions were not true?"* The waiter comes over to ask if I would like anything else, the time is now quarter to two, so I politely decline, explain I am waiting for someone and then call Joan to see if there is a problem, *"I am so sorry, it had slipped my mind…. If I leave now, I will be there in twenty minutes"*. I assure her that it is not an issue and that we can simply meet another day, but she insists and I agree to wait. Thirty minutes later Joan arrives, looking extremely flustered. I buy her a coffee and chat amiably for a few minutes, allowing her to catch her breath and relax....

Six minutes into the interview and I have yet to elicit any direct replies on humour, so when Joan says that the food processing squads are, *"one of the few places where people may form collegial relationships"*, I interject with a quick story, "the squad were discussing how they enjoyed working at the Coop, because it allowed them to interact with other people and feel like they were part of a community where everyone benefits, when one girl said "I only work here for the cheese". We all laughed, even though she was being serious". This girl was referring to the high quality, yet relatively cheap cheese that the store specializes

in. Joan misses the irony and rather than laugh, says *"are you sure that wasn't me? One of the reasons I stay a member, as it is not easy for me to get there, is the price of cheese"*. She pauses and I wait for her to speak, *"I was on another food processing shift, after you and I were on that same shift, where the squad leader did nothing and that just irritated me"*. I ask if people joked about that, but she says they didn't. I continue to try and bring the conversation around to humour, but cannot gain any traction. She explains that many squad leaders and coordinators *"will not own their power"*, so I interject "those coordinators who are not interested in exercising authority, may fall back on humour as a way to interact and influence others". Joan continues, *"that is one way you use your power, because it is not power of the person, but power of the role"*. She then talks about an office coordinator talking down to her, *"I've gone to two graduate schools, I'm intelligent, I'm whatever and when somebody treats you like you're stupid, you become incompetent".....what's the word? Some animals are more equal than others (7.3).... the coordinators run the Coop, they're the managers"*. I try to steer the conversation to humour again and am rewarded some minutes later, *"if you're laughing at the Coop as if it's different than you, you're not taking responsibility as a member. Most of us do not take our ownership role seriously" (8.2)*. I feel some encouragement, and catch myself thinking, "perhaps our conversation is about to brighten up". I ask whether ownership provides a platform to voice opinions through humour? Joan replies, *"when people complain about the Coop all the time, to me that is a very self-victimizing place that I just don't resonate with"*. I begin to "zone-out" and wonder whether Joan isn't just using this interview as a soundboard to discuss what she believes is wrong with the Coop (Cant and Sharma, 1998). She seems to sense my thoughts and says:

> *"When we were on that same shift with that squad leader. I mean, she is the exception to the rule; this woman who is just trying to have everybody involved and talking to each other and laughing. There was nothing of the bitter; somebody is a butt of the joke kind of humour. She's the kind of person that's a joy to work for and so you do your best because it's a nice environment to be in"*.

I pause to see if she will continue and then ask whether all humour has a butt? *"I use humour in my work, if I'm coaching and trying to help somebody. I kind of hold the mirror up to somebody and use humour, so that they can kind of see how ludicrous they're being. It's done in a loving way, they know that, they feel that"*. I ask if the culture of the Coop is changing due to the gentrification of the surrounding neighbourhood. *"In the sense of the entitled people that you see at the Coop, I think that's a microcosm of the entitled people in Park Slope, yeah, definitely"*. How do you think that affects the humour? *"I'm not sure, because I think by the time I joined it was already pretty gentrified"*. How do you think humour and laughter affects our understanding of what it is to be a member of the organization?

> Joan, *"that's a hard one, because except for that shift that you and I were on, I don't think I associate a lot of humour with Coop. When I think of humour in terms of bringing people together, I think, for example, of friends or family, you have your little private jokes, things that you say and you laugh together with each other. I don't think I've experienced that at the Coop"*.

I feel myself wilt, just when I felt we were getting on track, the rug is pulled from under my feet and I feel the faint touch of despondency. Joan, *"it's more a laughter, when you catch the eye of somebody, when someone has just done something outrageous and it's kind of like, yeah, that's the Coop"*. I am "back-in-the-room", and ask her to expand on that, because that is something I have noticed myself. Joan, *"I can't think of a specific example"* and then she retreats and waits for another question. I try to encourage her with a story of my own, "I was working on a shift where this really sweet and nice woman kept interjecting into what I was doing, telling me in intricate detail, how to process each step of bagging loose

olives. Behind her, there was another woman just raising her eyes. I smiled in acknowledgement and then she just started laughing. There was an implicit understanding between us and that was funny". This doesn't spark anything, so I look down at my interview schedule, aware that I need to fill the empty space that is appearing between us, "do you think that humour at the Coop is different to other places you' have worked? *"It's so hard, because at the Coop you're shopping sometimes, you're working sometimes, so it's kind of hard to differentiate those experiences, at the same time, I've had some really nice experiences at the Coop. When I'm on checkout I love to ask people, because I don't know half the vegetables, what is it, what do you with it, it's like I pick up recipes and I think people are often very willing to talk about food and how they cook something...."* Is it just me, or is it cold in here? I try to *"go inside for inner peace and wisdom"*, while reaching down to the table to take a firm grip on my interview schedule, sensing a chill wind blowing in…..

This pattern of questions and answers continues, with me trying to keep the conversation trained on humour, but sensing that I have lost nearly all control of the discourse. Even after I begin to "machine-pistol" questions from my interview schedule, hoping some might stick, Joan resolutely "sticks-to-her-guns", only barely touching-on my lines of enquiry. I begin to labour; my mouth dries; my eyes dull; my desire dampens; my stomach growls…. Weariness sets in at the 45 minute mark, but then, slowly at first, but with subtle pacing, Joan begins to seize the day, literally, and switches the interview on to me. She is the one asking the questions. I liven up, torn from my momentary stupor, aware that this marks a departure from previous interviews, where I carried out the inquiry. Determined to see this thing through, I try to regain my "edge"…. Try to "wring" one solid narrative on humour from the closing moments. I gather myself, take a mental step-back and explain that we have come to the end of my questions and that I have some themes that have emerged from my interviews and observations. Hoping to pique her curiosity, I ask "would you like to comment on my ideas"? I feel a "sense-of-pride", when this clearly hits-the-mark. We begin again, but immediately fall back into familiar patterns, with our lack of chemistry becoming ever more embarrassing to both parties. At some point, I ask, "do your own values fit with the official values of the Coop? Joan, *"it depends on what the stated values are and the active values are. I have no problem with the stated values; I just don't think we as an organization necessarily manifest those" (6.5).* I respond by explaining that other interviewees have spoken about not joking out loud, in case their views do not fit in. Joan asks, *"can you give me an example"?* I provide a quick anecdote about a coordinator who I have shared some banter with. This member's humour is very straight-faced, understated and direct and I found it funny when he tried to "wind-me-up". However, his humour has led to some members complaining about him, even though he is popular member of staff. Joan, *"what is that expression?* I explain what the expression "wind-up" means to me. Joan, *"have you got an example"?* I feel a sense of release, as I tell a quick anecdote about the same coordinator asking me to read a store leaflet "on the importance of organic and non-organic produce not touching", before I started work on his receiving squad. Once I had finished reading the pamphlet, he took the leaflet from me, said "I am now going to test you", and asked "which direction should you place bags of carrots in the stores produce cooler". Joan, *"where is the humour in that"?* Like a drowning man facing the inevitable, I answer again, aware that my interview is lapsing into farce, "I think he was just testing me to see if I "bit"; "I read it as a light-hearted power play and said something like, "do I look like bugs bunny to you", he smiled, put down the pamphlet and asked if I would mind carrying a box through to the store", it felt like we had formed a quick connection….. Some minutes later, after I have finished answering Joan's questions, I head back outside to the ice wind, it hits me, this would be a key interview, one that would shape my next conversations and allow me to progress "as researcher", enable me to "*avoid limiting myself through my own beliefs and assumptions"….*

The problems I encountered, allowed me to reflect on my feelings and insecurities in positive ways, leading to the first revision of my semi-structured interview schedule. I revisited my questions and decided to change some, so that they no longer directly addressed my literature review and theoretical positions (2.8). There was a section that focused on the Coop and its structures and subsequent questions addressed humour more generally. I attempted to rephrase certain questions to fit the developing themes. I started to think about how I could reframe questions in order to loosen participants up and provide reference points for their ideas. I also decided to focus some of my questions around participant life experiences and how this affected what they found funny. Participants often directed their answers to the Coop, but their career, family, friends and sense of self were all relevant to my thesis and I provided more space for these to be presented. I also started to examine some of the stereotypes presented in the media and found that these resonated with participants in interesting ways. I decided to simplify some of the questions to make them more consistent with the everyday conversations that we have about our relations to others. It seems obvious now, but it took a period of time, before I asked the central question, "what do you find funny at the coop?" Too many of my early questions were too abstract and this reflected my concern for internalizing my theoretical perspectives outlined in section (2.8). I had begun to picture humour through the prism of certain discourses and needed time in order to paraphrase these in ways that felt more relevant to informants.

Humour and laughter are not unambiguous and need to be interpreted in order to signify underlying understandings, meanings and social implications. Therefore, to some extent my emphasis was always on creating a plausible and authoritative text (Van Maanen, 1988). My perspectives sometimes differed to that of my informants, so that while I attempted not to confuse my insights with the materials on which they were founded, certain voices have gone unheard and the participant insights that influenced me and illuminated my texts inevitably reflected my own outlooks (Nandhakumar and Jones. 1997: 126). While I was naturally partial to participants who could verify and extend my theoretical perspectives, I was careful to listen to alternative explanations and these sometimes provided new frames of reference that influenced my thinking (Easterby-Smith *et al*., 2008: 422). For example, one of my participants explained that he did not joke with others inside the organization in the same way he joked outside the Coop, due to a lack of familiarity with other members. This explanation was interesting, but it seemed too obvious and led me to think about how a culture of cooperation, equality and mutuality shapes the types of humour used. This interpretation of interpretation (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000) recognised the complex ways that knowledge production is influenced by discourse and subjectivity, and slanted the interaction towards my

own theoretical perspectives. This opened up a new line of inquiry that I extended in later interviews (Katz, 2004).

I came to understand that my ideas, perspectives and insights were co-constructed and that this had insulated me to some extent, from producing an unimaginative and narcissistic analysis. As I listened to my interviews, it became clear that my perspectives were not simply individual and personal, but rather pluralistic, in that they were born through my dialogue with interviewees. This perception countered my initial fears and frustrations that my interviews were not providing enough "quality" data and made my method clearer, allowing me to picture and comprehend myself as a *"bricoleur"* (Levi-Strauss, 1966: 17). The dialogue within interviews involves flights of imagination, where the interviewee strives to place themselves in the researcher's "reality", reinterpreting humour and laughter, repositioning its aesthetics and repositioning their own actions and reactions, a *"hermeneutic circle"* (Strauss, 1987: 22), where we mutually transformed each other's ideas through interaction. This involved participants picturing themselves in certain scenarios and explaining how they use humour and laughter in contexts supplied by me. At times interviewees pictured the world *"as though for the first time"* (Cooper and Burrell, 1988: 101) and revealed something of themselves that had an important influence on my own perspectives going forward. I was conscious that their voice and "innate knowledge" (Bittner, 1973) would allow me to present a reflexive account (Weick, 1999: 803) and always attempted to enrich my own perspectives and interpretations, through those of my interviewees, always sensitive to the understanding that I did not know better than them (Van Maanen, 1979: 545).

I consider myself well-travelled; open minded; liberal; laid back and I always attempt to engage with people openly and honestly, even if at times, it involves having to read the understated signs that I exhibit, including those things I find funny and ironic. However, my personality, character and life story contain numerous contradictions, prejudices, misconceptions and flaws:

> *"….all writing slants the way a writer leans, and no man is born perpendicular"*
> (E. B. White, 1899-1985).

My own partialities became apparent when listening to the recordings of my interviews. The first time I heard a recorded conversation, I could barely recognise the sound of my own voice, but it was most definitely mine, replete with my opinions, preconceptions and views (Geertz, 1995: 18). I often influenced my interviewees, whether it was what I said; in the nod of approval; the way I moved the conversation on; when I laughed, smiled and frowned; when I

stuttered; when I became animated and when I appeared uninterested (Katz, 2004). I doubt whether mine is a face for poker and it has been said I wear my heart on my sleeve. Therefore, I am someone who has to have a say, even when I am not saying anything. Interviews are very much a function of mood, compatibility, chemistry and context, so that if all the ingredients are not present, very often the interview feels like a struggle. A great interview from the perspective of the interviewer is to some extent unattainable, as the ones you thought went well, turned out to be relatively dull and ones that you thought went fairly badly, sometimes unearthed a great quote or an important insight. You often have to work harder when there is an element missing in the interaction. When things appear a little too easy, the interview often becomes too casual, or descends into mutual appreciation and agreement, becoming stale.

My interview method was often unpolished and unrefined (Van Maanen, 1988) and I was careful to remain reflexive throughout my process of data collection. I recognised that my interview technique was replete with many of my own strengths and weaknesses (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) and wondered whether my informal, relaxed and affable style was too unorthodox (Jeffcut, 1993). I took comfort in the feedback from my participants, many of whom had experience in the field. Some offered me the benefit of their experience and I was always open to advice (Weick, 1998). For example, one participant told me that if you ask a question and then just wait in silence, the interviewee will often begin talking, in order to fill the social space. Whenever I asked a key question, I employed this technique going forward. Therefore, there was a dynamic relationship between my research method and participant feedback and advice (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995) that enriched the research experience and offered important clues as to whether I was on track.

I came to realize that the structure of the interview was extremely important, as it helped to provide context and allowed me to bring the conversation back to the central themes. This allowed me to have more focus and influenced the direction and flow of the conversation. In the worst case, the interview became a meandering conversation, where the interaction got bogged down and ultimately revealed very little in the way of insight. I also discovered that many interviewees tended to defer to my interpretations, leading to agreement, when it is more interesting to discuss points from different perspectives. When transcribing certain interviews it was clear that the process had become rather one-sided and “narcissistic”, with me dominating the discussion. I also decided that the period before and after the interview (the informal part) often provides some probing insights. The conversations often continued after the interview had wound to a close and it was during this time, that some participants seemed to take the information we had discussed and had processed our conversation, so that my perspectives had already begun to provide a framework for ideas, allowing me to capture views

and opinions that slipped out in these informal spaces.

After transcribing my initial interviews I realized that many of my participants had arrived with preconceptions about the interview process and appeared to expect very structured questions. I therefore began including a brief overview of the interview process, so that they understood it as a conversation "with" purpose (Burgess, 1984: 102); a loosely structured dialogue between two people, on specific themes and ideas. This proved to be extremely important and I felt frustrated with myself for not thinking of it sooner. For example, the evolving nature of each interview meant that I often was not able to think on my feet quickly, so that some of what I said, was not worded as a question. While many participants still took these discussion points as a signal for their opinion, others sat passively waiting for a question. As I moved on with the process, many of the questions came more naturally. I continued to work with the literature and constantly changed and added questions, while tacking back and forth between my fuzzy categories (Silverman, 2000)[53].

As I listened to the interviews, I could clearly hear my confidence and artistry grow, but this was not always to the advantage of my research, because my new found confidence also provided opportunities to egotistically dominate conversations that would have been better left to breathe. My natural inclination to talk and to engage enthusiastically with the interviewee often led me to talk, when another would have remained quiet in order to hand over the reins. While many interviewees interjected naturally, whenever I sparked a memory or thought, others remained passive, content to sit and wait for me to finish. In the worst cases the interview ground on, with me continuing to probe and discuss humour with very little success. My own sense of discomfort and a natural tendency to fill any long pauses myself often got the better of me, when it may have been better to leave longer pauses and wait for a response before moving on. This problem often surfaced when I perceived the participant was struggling to find their voice and stemmed to some extent from the embarrassment this might cause. There is such a strong desire to keep the interview on track, that you begin to anticipate where the conversation is headed and at times, when you listen back, you realize you were mistaken and that the interviewee was putting together something of interest, only to be redirected by my over-zealousness. Knowing when to talk, when to steer and when to remain passive is all part of developing and practicing one's skills as an interviewer, but it would be naive to think I ever truly became an expert, or managed to fully restrain my natural inclination to enliven

53 *"a jumble of literature consultation, data collection, and analysis conducted in ongoing iterations that produce many relatively fuzzy categories that, over time, reduce to fewer, clearer conceptual structures"* (Suddaby, 2006: 637).

the conversation. Rather, accomplishments were situational and depended on how the interaction was playing out, so that practice never made perfect (Fox, 2006: 441).

I have come to the conclusion that I am not very good at directing questions. I am less structured than other people and this affected the conversations. I tend to ask few questions when I speak to people in general and feel conscious about not probing or making the other person feel uncomfortable. I once read a passage in the famous novel Naked Lunch, which stated *“"Gentlemen I will slop a pearl: You can find out more about someone by talking than by listening"* (Burroughs, 1959: 80) and this has influenced my ideas on how to interact with people at a distance; observing their reactions, in order to perceive their character, outlooks and sense of self. This attribute hardly helped me elicit responses as an interviewer, but my failings were offset to some degree by my ability to create an environment, where there were no wrong answers. I found it natural to foster a dialogue and this included providing the opportunity for my interviewees to challenge my assumptions (Easterby-Smith *et al*., 2008: 422). As I grew as an interviewer, my semi-structured interview schedule incorporated a small set of key questions around each emerging theme and I became more concerned with ensuring that we discussed each theme in some detail. My short-comings asking questions were somewhat offset by the informal, relational tone that my interviews took and most of the later interviews were extremely rewarding and insightful. I had found my own style and self-consciously decided that I should play to my strengths and admit my weaknesses, often playfully explaining to my participant that “I wasn’t very good at interviewing people, but would try to ensure that our conversation always remained interesting”.

My experiences helped me to comprehend when an interviewee was engaging with my probes in ways that developed important insights and also when an interviewee was being too passive, or losing focus, but successful conversations were still situated in the moment and it is important to recognise that my voice had an impact on interviewee observations, so that their dialogue was a reflexive process, that provided a sense of mutuality. These shared interpretations, reciprocal understandings and stories opened up room for new perspectives and in some cases piercing insights that subsequently affected my thought process (Boje, Luhman and Baack, 1999: 358). A conversation with purpose (Burgess, 1984: 102) might spark an idea, that suddenly took hold and I was aware as an interviewer, that I found myself talking so that my thoughts would be recorded, allowing me to access them in the future. The *“theories that matter the most are those theories that have emotional resonance”* (Weick, 1999: 134) and I had to learn to curb my enthusiasm to prevent an interview becoming disjointed by me rushing to speak before the interviewee had concluded their remark. These sudden bursts of inspiration also became an excellent journal of how certain interpretations

were made plurivocally, with a conversation leading to me articulating elements of humour or laughter that raised my theoretical positions (2.8) from abstract to the concrete, but it could be frustrating that while interviewees often agreed, many did not articulate the idea for themselves, but rather came to a similar conclusion based on the ebb and flow of our conversation. However, it was extremely encouraging to find my theoretical perspectives providing a good fit for emerging themes and phenomena. These interpretations and perceptions helped demonstrate the subtle ways that members used humour and laughter fluidly to comprehend the organization and other people, providing important connections and disconnections that shaped understandings (Rynes, McNatt, & Bretz, 1999) and added colour to my original ideas and writing.

9.6 Conclusion

My participants provided many interesting turns of phrase and perspectives and this discourse often appeared endless, so that I was always tempted to *"spend more time in the field to dig a little deeper and probe a little further"* (Van Maanen, 1979: 549). I was confident that I had reflectively engaged with my method and had uncovered interesting insights that were informed and structured by my theoretical positions (2.8), fostered through my interaction with the organization and its members. However, it became clear listening to the interviews that follow up emails and conversations would be very rewarding. While many interviewees had provided interesting and important insights, there had sometimes been a lack of detailed and coherent quotes. I became concerned that I did not have a large enough stock of replies for my write-up and that this would have a negative effect on the quality of my thesis (Corbin and Strauss, 1990: 19). These ongoing conversations helped to provide clarity and depth to participant insights and meant that I began to perceive my interviews as comprehensive and central to my final analysis. It was at this point that I decided I had enough data for my final write-up and that saturation had been reached (Glaser and Strauss, 1967: 62). I reflected on how far I had come as an organizational researcher, aware that my growth was ongoing and contextual. I had greatly improved my understanding of humour and laughter in the field, aided by daily conversations and semi-structured interview narratives. During my time on site, I had discussed my research perspectives on humour and laughter vocally (relatively for the first time) and I became exponentially better at voicing ideas and principles that had been previously consigned to paper and in-so-doing furthered my evolution as academic.

10. Conclusions

10.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I draw together salient themes that framed my thesis through four readings, each providing a convergent theoretical interpretation of materials (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). These readings encompassed how I came to shape my analysis and were written to provide a cohesive conclusion to my thesis, while further demonstrating that I reflexively engaged with my research epistemology to consistently *"investigate what I intended to investigate"* (Kvale, 1996: 88). My ontological and epistemological positions recognise that context and behaviour are interdependent (Cassell and Symon, 1994), reflecting the "postmodern turn", focusing on irony, ambiguity and social structures (Patton, 2003) and the "linguistic turn", recognising the constructed nature of language, identities and knowledge (Foucault, 1977). This holistic viewpoint provided a broad methodology for examining the ways in which humour and laughter interacted with relations of power and I paid careful attention to ensure my findings reflected and focused on the meanings given to humour by my participants (Richardson, 1990).

10.2 Constructing My Readings

There were other readings that I could have constructed to discuss my findings. For example, I considered using the humour theories of Bergson, Hobbes and Freud to construct three separate readings. However, I decided to emphasise the overarching framework that shaped my own thoughts and positions during my research. My discussion reflects my attempts to hold research materials *"together by an interpretive framework of coherent sociological concepts"* (Zijderveldl, 1995: 345) and highlights how findings were established through substantive theoretical logic (Bryman, 1988). The theories, references and quotes that substantiate my discussion were not simply added during the write up; rather these were the literatures with which I consulted throughout my data analysis, so that they augmented my theoretical positions (2.8) and influenced my thought process, providing persuasive rhetorical arguments for my interpretations (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Throughout my thesis, I have given voice to various scholars, reinterpreting their views and turns of phrase to lend support to my account of humour at the Coop. This ethnography represents my reflexive journey towards becoming a professional scholar and I have constantly tried to produce a document that will not only allow me to gain a doctorate, but also provide a wealth of materials to enhance the likelihood of publishing findings and works within my chosen field. I hope that in doing so, those quoted and referenced will recognise their views and perspectives within

my own construction of organizational realities. Humour and laughter were never mentioned in many of these texts, rather I have taken established ideas in order to construct a *"wider resonance"* (Mason, 1996: 6).

10.3 The Four Readings - Taken Collectively

Rather than disjointed and unfocused, interpretations were drawn through my engagement with literature that situated humour and laughter within relations of power (Foucault, 1991; Giddens, 1976) to provide a thoughtful and pluralistic analysis of how humour and laughter were part of the language games that constituted dominant discourses (Clegg, 1989). An account shaped by my own experiences as researcher and organizational member, so that my discussion began by reflecting my authorial personality (Alvesson, *et al*., 2008: 484) by situating myself within research materials in order to take account of my preconceptions and inclinations (8.2). My own interests underscore *"the inherent partiality of any reading process"* (Morgan, 1997: 371) and I have been careful in order to recognise that my interpretation of materials meant that certain points of view were suppressed or avoided in my final account (Gergen and Gergen, 2000: 1027). I was instinctively drawn to listen more intently to some members rather than others and it is entirely possible that another researcher would have provided a different emphasis in organizing the research data and in targeting participants.

My research epistemology embraced a need to "think otherwise" (Mumby, 2001) and this was reflected in the final three readings that demonstrated what I found interesting about humour and laughter. Themes that were dropped or amalgamated during analysis reappear as explanatory texts (8.5.4) to illustrate my own theoretical sensitivities. By revealing the frameworks which occupied my thoughts during my analysis, I have attempted to provide further insight into the ways I *"[constructed] meanings, both collective and individual, out of communication processes that [were] inherently ambiguous and open to multiple interpretations"* (Mumby, 2001: 595). These readings collectively illustrate my thought processes and provide the reader with more scope to engage with my interpretations and ordering of materials constructively (Glaser, 1978).

In Section (8.3) I used the framework of Goffman's (1959) essay to discuss how humour permitted actors at play to foster power/knowledge relationships that provided meaning and perspective (Brown, Gabriel and Gherardi, 2009). Members constructed humour and laughter as mutual connections founded on shared outlooks and pleasures (Dixon, 2011):

> *"....there lives in our soul, the soul of the.... community of which we are part. We unconsciously feel the pressure of other people's way of judging, feeling and acting.... the more habitual they become, the less they are noticed"* (Pirandello, 1974: 134).

The jointly constructed meanings that fashioned humour and laughter shaped interactions and allowed members to fluidly form social bonds (7.8). Dominant discourses regarding mutuality and affiliation allowed members to construct social connection and relatedness as central to cooperation (6.3) and participants talked about locating themselves through shared humour, leading to more nuanced relationships that were disciplined through social connection, relatedness and mirth (Lewicki and Bunker, 1996). Humour and laughter shaped interactions and allowed members to present themselves as reflexive individuals who found funny those who appeared on the surface to have forgotten or ignored a need to connect and identify with others (5.6):

> *"....a violation of the code that humans are supposed to be reasonable individuals, that we should be flexible and fit in with others, not cause all kinds of complications by being so one-dimensional, so rigid"* (Berger, 1993: 3).

Humour reflects belief systems and can be understood as a language game, where power is obscured and indirect. This is reflected in my discussion of the ways in which members presented themselves to others (8.3) and how the *"activity of a given participant on a given occasion [served] to influence other participants"* (Goffman, 1959: 26). Humour and laughter transmit views and understandings, shaping dialogues that are drawn from endless frames of reference and multiple sources of influence (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). I had considered discussing in more detail how this allowed members to construct multiple identities that embraced discourses from wider sources of influence, recognising that humour and laughter represented social practice in action, shaping, distorting and unifying, so that discourse and those subject to linguistic patterns of control retained the leeway to mould themselves through new and limitless frames of reference (Knights, 2002). Humour permitted members to conceive organizational reality as relational and this was reflected in the perspectives of informants who constructed humour as integral to how they comprehended the meaning of cooperation (5.3):

> *"....interpersonal relationships, which provide a sense of pleasure and well-being, are stronger determinants of how we experience and enact power than the fear and oppression that might characterise our structured organizational*

entanglements" (Dixon, 2011: 291).

In my final write up, this theme was re-emphasised to capture the "power in" humour and came to make up a substantial part of my discussion in section (8.4). Humour provided new frames of reference that came to diminish previous organizational conceptions (5.2). Informants constructed humour as a vehicle for changing attitudes (7.7), because jokes and stories often *"reproduce the dominant social view of reality and hence enable…. social views to be questioned"* (Rhodes, 2001: 377). Humorous discourse often challenged taken for granted conceptions of reality through the mobilisation of alternative discourses that were constructed in response to or in relation to dominant organizational narratives (Smith, 1981: 217). This created a degree of ambiguity, incongruity and complexity that fed and nurtured humour, creating multifaceted accounts of reality (7.4) where perhaps there was once only one (Knights, 2002).

The final reading brings my analysis full circle from my findings chapters, that began with an in depth look at how humour constituted structure and agency at the Coop, demonstrating how humour was tied to organizational texts (5.1). This chapter provided a platform to examine the various ways members constructed humour to constitute power (6.) and shape identities (7.). This final reading (8.5) discusses *"the link between agency and structure, demonstrating that power resides not simply in relations of cause and effect, but in the structured relations of autonomy and dependence that are an endemic feature of organizational life"* (Mumby, 2001: 588-589). Humour demonstrates the limitless and multifaceted nature of language, mobilizing discourses from alternative sites, times, contexts, influences and mutual experiences (7.5). Humour embodies the "two faces of power" (Bachrach and Baratz, 1962), structure and agency, the social and the individual, autonomy and discipline, subjectivity and rationality, formality and informality, that tug at our conceptions (Zizek, 1999): *"….here, then is the very nub of the conflict; the careful form of art, and the careless shape of life itself…. if he resists it, conceals it, destroys it, he may keep his architectural scheme intact and save his building, and the world will never know. If he gives in to it, he becomes a humourist and the sharp brim of the fools cap leaves a mark forever on his brow"* (White, 1941: xix, quoted in Davis, 1993: 322).

10.4 Contributions

My in-depth case study adds to the canon of academic research that constructs organizations as sites of power (e.g. Mumby, 1987; Fairclough, 1995; Fournier, 1999; Clegg *et al*. 2006) to provide a rich account of the importance of discourse in shaping organisational structures. My

study examined embedded and reflexive meanings through a rigorous methodology that was underpinned by my original theoretical positions (2.8). This approach recognises that qualitative enquiry should provide originality, so that attention is shifted to aspects of organization previously hidden or missed, allowing others to see familiar objects and procedures in a new light (Kvale, 1996: 241). Humour provides discursive objects (Giddens, 1979) that are integral to the process of sensemaking (Weick, 1995), *"shaping reality and opening up space for different concepts and perceptions"* (Clegg et al., 2006: 295). As such, my thesis provides a rich source of material to further our understanding of the ways in which relations of power are established and maintained within organizations. Humour both emphasises and disturbs relations of power to warrant consideration in any discussion of discourse, mutual action and identity formation within organizations.

My thesis makes a number of contributions to the literatures on identity formation. Humour and laughter shaped identity formation at the Coop and my epistemology, together with my theoretical perspectives (2.8) provided a novel lens through which to interpret empirical data. My ethnography is one of only a handful of qualitative empirical studies examining humour in organizations and provided a set of research questions intended to extend existing knowledge and theory. While the literature on identity work is growing steadily, there are as yet, not a wide number of empirical studies that directly address the process of identity construction (cf. Humphreys and Brown, 2002; Thornborrow and Brown, 2009). This thesis contributes to the literature on the relationship between sensemaking and identity construction, which Colville, Pye and Carter (2013: 1217) describe as *"underdeveloped as an area of research"* (cf. Gioia, Price, Hamilton and Thomas, 2010). My reflexive study provided a number of empirical materials that give voice to the intricacies of organizational behaviour by providing a platform for participants to give meaning to the discourses that shaped their views and understandings. As such my study contributes to the literature exploring identity-relevant narratives that are expressed by members of an organization, viewing identity construction as an exercise in power (Brown, Humphreys and Gurney, 2005). My ethnography examined the ways that organizational members constructed identities through their capacity to keep particular narratives going *"into an ongoing story about the self"* (Giddens, 1991: 54).

Organizational members provided dynamic and multifaceted accounts of the importance of humour in constructing identities and these narratives often embraced the duality inherent within dominant discourses (Giddens, 1984). Those things insiders found funny provided a shared language that became a persistent influence in how discourses were mobilised, interpreted and maintained (Gabriel *et al.*, 2000). Humour can be understood as a "search for instabilities" (Lyotard, 1984) and this represents a metaphor for my study, which was a

conscious effort to extract members' statements to a theoretical level, focusing on the interaction and integration of theory and empirical data (Brown 1998: 39). The paradoxes embedded in humour framed the incongruity and ambiguity within the discourses that gave meaning to everyday interactions (Billig, 2005) and provided an original perspective for examining the complex interrelation between the individual and the social. It is when concepts appear to operate paradoxically, that the researcher has discovered something novel (Van Maanen, 1979) and humour often framed the tension inherent between agency and structure to reflect the importance of relations of power in shaping attitudes and perspectives.

This study viewed humour as one way that people engage with discourses to create meaning and aims to make a valuable contribution to our understanding of organisational structure and the complex interrelation between humour and power, by considering humour, power and structure in dynamic and complex ways (Billig, 2005). I examined the ways members mobilised dominant discourses to construct humour and how this influenced how discourses were constituted at the Coop. The focus was on the interplay of knowledge and power and how humour disciplined perspectives to strengthen dominant discourses. I also examined how humour drew on alternative discourses, constituting agency even within the most dominant structures. This should contribute theoretically to the study of organizational power and extend the literature examining the discursive production of identities. While discourse is governed to some extent through relations of power, language remains distinctively rich and empowering, because within all meanings are the seeds needed to reinvent, adapt and evolve. Mutual dialogues are central to everyday sensemaking and *"understanding the subtle workings of power in organizational communication may also serve to denaturalise the assumption of power as domination, making it less stable and therefore, open to evolution"* (Pierce and Dougherty, 2002: 131). Humour and laughter are integral to this process, fostering a wide range of often competing discourses, from multiple sources of inspiration (Bakhtin, 1986).

My vignettes can be understood as *"a thread connecting researcher, researched and reader"* (Humphreys, 1999: 275) and provide *"versions of the truth… for the collective to judge"* (Butler, 1997: 928). The nature of this study meant that the empirical materials were often abstract (Martin and Turner, 1986) and *"in the absence of unambiguous foundational truth in the social sciences, the only sensible way forward can be conscious pluralism"* (Pettigrew, 2001: 62). My vignettes emerged *"from the writing of the ethnography itself and thus are no less a part of the ethnographic process than any of the other stories"* (Humphreys, 1999: 274). These "impressionist tales" (Van Maanen, 1988) allowed me to *"provide a rich description of the social scene, to describe the context in which events occur, and to reveal the deep structure*

of social behaviour" (Dyer and Wilkins, 1991: 615). This contributes to the literature on the need for reflexivity within research and recognises that *"the ability to write knowledge whilst at the same time drawing attention to the fact that the knowledge is written"* (Rhodes, 2001: 32) is an integral part of ethnographic research, where the emphasis is on interpreting *"naturally occurring phenomena in the social world"* (Van Maanen, 1979: 520). In writing this thesis, I placed a high degree of importance on developing and sharpening my writing skills (Gabriel, 1998), recognising that my "storytelling abilities" would have a bearing on the quality of my research (Dyer and Wilkins, 1991). In detailing my own involvement and participation in the construction of tacit meanings (DeWalt and DeWalt, 2002), I have attempted to follow in the footsteps of other researchers in my field who have furthered contemporary organizational studies through *"reflexive forms of field work, analysis, and intertextual representation"* (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998: 30).

My research was also motivated in part by the current paucity of qualitative empirical studies into humour in organizations (Collinson, 2002). This thesis is one of only a handful of qualitative studies critically examining humour and laughter in the workplace (cf. Watson, 1994, Terrion and Ashforth, 2002; Holmes, 2000), yet humour often comes to represent the incongruity and intertextuality inherent in all dominant discourse (Clegg, 1989). This study adds to the conceptual understanding of humour in organisations, by providing an original perspective that brings new evidence to bear (Phillips and Pugh, 1994). My approach was interpretive (Glaser and Strauss 1967), viewing reality as being constructed through discourse (Foucault, 1972) and provides valuable insights into the meanings humour had for organizational members (Richardson, 1990), highlighting the importance of constructing new theoretical perspectives in order to reconceptualise, reconsider and reinterpret social phenomenon.

Finally, my thesis examined perspectives across the organization to provide a *"multi-cultural image [that avoided any] management-centric bias"* (Gregory, 1983: 373). This is in keeping with my own outlook as researcher, but was also shaped by the unique and famous organization that I was fortunate to spend time researching. Hopefully, my thesis will lead to papers that focus primarily on the Coop itself, to provide a first-hand account of the camaraderie and community spirit that was fostered through dominant discourses governing equality, mutuality, trust and reciprocation. My presence as an Englishman abroad in this unique and successful organization will hopefully allow others to find my ethnography particularly interesting (Edwards *et al.*, 1995).

10.5 Limitations and Ideas for Future Research in the Field

While the Coop did not have a typical hierarchical power structure, my research would indicate that humour often emphasises dominant discourses and future studies should examine the various ways in which managers try to utilise and control humour. Future research examining humour, power and identity construction could look to elicit the insecurities that help define how relations of power are formed and rationalized within organizations. For example, managers often seek to defend against the effects of socially constructed power relations, because of the anxieties that issues of power, authority and responsibility provoke (Vince, 1996). It might be that humour is viewed as being dangerous to established order and *"must be controlled and contained in some sort of enclave"* (Berger, 1997: 16). Organizational cultures *"contain informal, or hidden, disciplinary practices that form part of the everyday network of power relations"* (Casey, 1999; 172) and any culture that seeks to suppress humour and laughter would provide an interesting and rewarding site for critical management enquiry.

The "glass cage" that represents contemporary organisational control, also places limits on how managers can exercise overt controls (Gabriel, 2008: 313). Managers are often reluctant to publicly enact their leadership (Vince, 2001) and humour can be used tacitly to mobilise discourses, influencing subordinates, while simultaneously understating relations of power (Holmes, 2000). Managers often need to control the flow of discourse and humour can sometimes be seen as a threat to the rhetoric that they seek to perpetuate (Westwood, 2004). Managers are often viewed as the conduits of organisational goals. However, they will often seek to serve their own vested interests (Watson, 1982) and it is unlikely that any two will interpret and voice organisational discourse in the same way (Clegg *et al*., 2006). Therefore, future studies could seek to elicit management centric views and understandings concerning humour and laughter that uncover the various ways their own outlooks are disciplined by the discourses that humour perpetuates and fosters.

During the course of this thesis, I tried unsuccessfully to gather data through a number of methods, such as focus groups; recording coordinator meetings and on the odd occasion, asking to record an informal conversation. I provided interviewees with copies of transcripts in order to elicit further views and tried to follow up my interviews with questions that arose from my engagement with our conversations. I was unsuccessful and while I remained reflexive throughout the process and paid careful attention to the meanings and perspectives furnished by participants, I have spent time wondering what affect this would have had on my interpretations. If I were to serialise each interviewee's statements embedded in my own interpretations and send them to them respectively via email, would it change the final written

version of my thesis? I do not believe that it would significantly change my findings, as my own interpretations would shade their responses. However, this process could make a significant contribution to the literature on reflexivity in ethnography. While the researcher will always maintain a privileged position in relation to their subjects and readers (Alvesson *et al*., 2008), a paper that focuses on the researched imprinting their own views and perceptions on the analysis could be used to provide contrasts. Thus not only allowing *"the audience to see the puppet's strings as they watch the puppet show"* (Watson, 1994: 78), but like a scene from the famous 1959 film "400 Blows", examine the reactions of those being observed, so that the signs constructed become many to one, rather than one to many (Thachankary, 1992: 231).

As I analysed my data, I came across statements and narratives that warranted significant appraisal, some of which have been left out in the final write up. I believe that this was due to my inexperience as an organizational researcher and more importantly, as an academic writer. It takes experience, expertise and a body of recognisable work to convince others that one quote represents a universal understanding, so that I swerved from further analysis in favour of a "safety-in-numbers" approach. As I build on my experiences and skills as an academic, I hope to return to some of these themes and am convinced that many have greater merit than I have presently shown them. An issue with a narrative approach to collecting and analysing data is that *"the study of humour is closely linked to the study of how speakers express and hearers retrieve propositional attitudes implicitly"* (Curco, 1996: 1). I had hoped to capture office coordinators trading jokes and humour during their monthly meetings, but the group was too large and the meeting room too big to capture dialogue accurately and meaningfully. This method of recording humour in meetings has been used successfully by other studies within the field (cf. Watson, 1994; Holmes and Marra, 2002) and could be used to examine, substantiate and critique a number of my own findings.

Finally, the insights disclosed within my ethnography do little to verify the cognitive processes that Freud (1928) theorised as a defence mechanism within humour. This line of reason still appeals to me and in my search for discursive instabilities, many informants embraced his sociological position. After such a significant time in the field, immersed within a discursive and interpretive perspective (3.3), I would argue that this signifies how individuality is entwined with structure in ways that shape meanings, beliefs and identities. Freud's ideas circulate society, providing discourse that explains and reveals our relation to the social, so that all actors are caught in this regime of power/knowledge (Foucault, 1980) and situated within a historic perspective that allows us to imagine ourselves and others as agentic beings buoyed by our egos, ids and a common desire for pleasure and connectedness…. and long may that continue.

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11. Appendices

11.1 Glossary of Terms

Alert: Owing work make-ups but still allowed to shop

Committee: The broadest category of work a member does at the Coop, such as Shopping, Food Processing, Receiving and Stocking, etc.

Entrance Desk: The front desk where members must check in every time they enter the shopping floor to work or to shop

Exit Desk: The desk where members must have their receipts stamped and the number of used bags/boxes checked before exiting the store

Extension: When members who have lost their shopping privileges are taken off "suspension" and put on "alert" by the Membership Office or by their Squad Leaders, giving them more time to complete their makeups and allowing them to shop; each extension lasts only until a member's next regularly scheduled work slot

FTOP: Future Time-Off Program, which allows members to work on a flexible schedule, making it possible to bank any number of work shifts for future use

General Coordinator: A member of the upper level of paid management who is responsible for the overall management of the Coop

General Meeting: Monthly meetings in which members discuss and vote on Coop policy

Grace Period: A consecutive 10-day period, activated at the entrance desk, in which shopping privileges are granted even though a member is “suspended” for work

Household: A group of adults over the age of 18 and out of high school who live together and share food or other items sold at the Coop. All are required to join and work the required work-slots in order that all adults can shop and enjoy member privileges

In Good Standing: A member owing zero make-ups and allowed to shop

Linewaiters' Gazette: The Coop's bi-weekly newspaper

Make-ups: Work shifts owing, accrued by members for not attending their regularly scheduled work slots

Membership Card: Coop-issued photo ID needed for entrance to the Coop

Membership Coordinator: One of a number of hourly paid staff who manages the Membership Office and performs other administrative tasks related to the coordination of member labour

New Member Orientation: An organized introduction to the Coop; attendance is required of all members.

Receiving Coordinator: One of a number of hourly paid staff who orders, receives and facilitates the stocking of products we sell at the Coop

Squad: A group of members that meets at the same time every four weeks to work as part of a Committee

Squad Leader: An unpaid member of a squad who takes on the extra responsibility of running the squad

“Suspended” for work: What happens any time a member owes any number of make-ups for more than four weeks. Being suspended means you will be unable to shop due to failure to complete make-ups.

Temporary Leave of Absence: When a member requests to put their membership on hold for a temporary period of time, with a minimum of eight weeks

11.2 The Coop Store and General Meetings

The front of store looks like a regular supermarket. However, only active working members may shop.

As you enter the store, you are greeted by a card reader and a member who has to ensure that your membership is active and that your shopping privileges have not been suspended. At this point you can take a cart or basket and begin shopping or head to your work shift. Working members manage the lines that snake around the store, work the checkouts and operate the cash tills situated by the exit. These cash tills are for members who are not paying by debit card or are using state food stamps. Credit cards are not accepted at the store, as there is a charge from the issuer that would increase the cost of purchases for all members. The image below was taken from a segment named Co-occupation on The Daily Show. Samantha B can be seen brandishing her US Passport, as she visits the store as a guest (with her camera crew) and passes by the entrance desk. The 5 minute skit humorously examined the historic April 2012 general meeting.

A member who is beginning their shift in receiving and stocking, first scans in at the entrance and then reports to the volunteer squad leader or full time coordinator at the receiving desk next to the rolling steel doors at the front of store. The delivery vehicles pull up on Union Street, in front of these bays and receivers are tasked with moving the produce into the store on trolleys. Some of the arriving produce is then stocked directly onto the shopping shelves by these members.

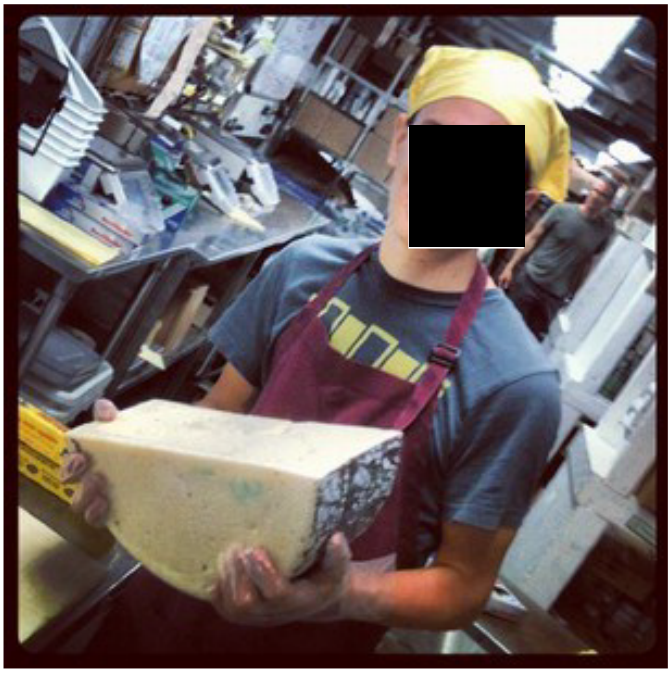
The remaining produce is sent down to the basement via service lifts and conveyor belt, where other receivers place the items in the appropriate storage space.

With so many members, the shopping floor can get extremely busy and space is tight. Unlike conventional supermarkets, the shelves are stocked throughout the day, so that large trolleys, receivers, grocery carts, prams and shoppers compete for space. When an item is not on the shelf, members can page out over the loud speakers, to ask if there is any in store. The picture

below represents a quiet period. At the weekend, it is not unusual to find all the shopping baskets and carts snaking around the floor, as restless members wait in line for the checkouts

> “It's tiny considering the amount of goods and produce that they have available. It's not just about the ground floor itself, in the basement and the office, space is very tight” “you have to work in very close proximity with all these people, so whatever you are doing; sweeping the floor, working checkout or bagging food, you are physically very close to people” (Annabelle, Volunteer Member, Maintenance).

To enter the basement, you walk past the receiving desk and down the back stairwell. As you reach the floor below, you are greeted by the sound of members chatting, as this corner of the store houses the food processing area (pictured), where squads’ price and bag bulk items for the shopping floor. Each squad contains around eight members, who process goods including cheese, dry fruit, nuts, spices and herbs. The work is carried out on large tables, one table on each wall and three arranged facing each other. This is the most popular squad in the coop and the most social, with conversations and laughter dominating the sound of the labelling machines.



You gain access to the offices on the upper floor by the staircase or lift situated to the right of the entrance area (before you scan in). The stairway also houses the community board, where members post adverts for massages, nannies, music teachers etc. There are also personal adverts, including at one time, an advert looking for a member who would like to sublet my wife and I's apartment, while we were away from New York (we rented to two separate members, whose parents wanted a place to stay in the neighbourhood, while visiting their new born grandchild).

The offices to the left of the staircase and lift house the membership office (pictured). There is a small full time coordinator office at the back of the one pictured, that connects with a sliding door. Full time coordinators split their time between the two spaces and all spend part of their time coordinating the membership office. These full time members are pictured on the left; the volunteer members sit on the seats along the far wall to the right. Coordinators often direct member queries to the volunteers, who are responsible for manning the phones.

In front of the membership office is a childcare room and a meeting room, the latter is also used for membership orientations and community events such as film shows, cooking classes, etc. The offices are to right of the ground floor staircase are split between full time receiving coordinators, accounting and general coordinators.

General Meetings

General meetings are held at the community hall of a local synagogue. They are generally relaxed affairs, with some members attending for work credit, while others wish to take a more active role in the running of the organization. Members who wish to make a discussion point put their hand up and are then invited to the microphone. While clapping, cheering and jeering is discouraged, laughter flies under the radar and is a welcome sound for those bored by the proceedings.

The April 2012 general meeting saw a record turnout, due to the historic vote on whether to hold a referendum on boycotting Israeli products and was held in an auditorium in a college in the nearby Forte Greene neighbourhood. The proposal was rejected by a vote of nearly 2 to 1, but highlighted that environmental and humanitarian issues are extremely relevant to a significant section of the membership and this has helped shaped the organizations' identity.

11.3 Examples of Interview Locations

The Tea Lounge

Café Du Nord

Gorilla Coffee

Blueprint

11.4 Schedule of Interviews

Pseudonym	Interview date	Duration	Location	Transcriber
Laura	12 Nov 11	54: 00	Laura's home	myself
Jon	12 Nov 11	63: 20	The Tea Lounge	myself
Tom	14 Dec 11	31: 30	Gorilla Coffee	myself
Cesc	23 Dec 11	71: 00	Cesc's home	myself
Katie	30 Dec 11	44: 20	The Tea Lounge	myself
Hattie	18 Jan 12	64: 22	Tazza, Court St	myself
Joan	20 Jan 12	68: 46	Flatbush Farm	professional
Annabelle	30 Jan 12	49: 00	My home	myself
Jimmy	06 Feb 12	76: 51	My home	myself
Alex	08 Feb 12	50: 00	Colson Patisserie	myself
Michael	08 Feb 12	51: 15	Maybelle's Cafe	myself
Mark	10 Feb 12	48: 40	My home	myself
Sarah	12 Feb 12	60: 20	Sarah's home	professional
Twila	14 Feb 12	51: 50	Gorilla Coffee	myself
Susie	21 Feb 12	78: 00	The Tea Lounge	myself
Sally	24 Feb 12	66: 26	The Tea Lounge	professional
Teresa	28 Feb 12	50: 30	The Tea Lounge	myself
Mandy	01 Mar 12	75: 15	De Luxe Coffee	professional
Brenda	05 Mar 12	33: 52	'sNice, 5th Ave	professional
Chris	15 Mar 12	33: 21	Think Coffee	myself
Karen	16 Mar 12	47: 52	Venticinque	professional
Fleur	26 Mar 12	62: 13	Konditori, 5th Ave	professional
Leo	27 Mar 12	53: 50	Christie's Patties	professional
Cathy	28 Mar 12	48: 19	Joyce bakeshop	myself
Emma	30 Mar 12	57: 10	Café Du Nord	professional
Emily	14 Apr 12	73: 28	Café Du Nord	professional
Rich	16 Apr 12	56: 52	The Tea Lounge	professional
Gaynor	16 Apr 12	67: 54	Café Du Nord	professional
Matt	17 Apr 12	58: 33	Noella Brew Bar	professional
Gary	17 Apr 12	54: 35	Noella Brew Bar	professional
Ellie	22 Apr 12	64: 50	Sit and Wonder	professional
Claire	01 May 12	58: 07	Starbucks, 7th Ave	professional
Paul	03 May 12	50: 20	Noella Brew Bar	professional

Fred	04 May 12	54: 29	Noella Brew Bar	professional
Patsy	10 May 12	54: 04	Konditori, 7th Ave	professional
Billy	17 May 12	59: 55	Ladybird bakery	myself
Tony	18 May 12	66: 13	Tony's home	myself
Julie	22 May 12	47: 00	Chote Nawab	myself
Charles	24 May 12	64: 02	Z-7 Classic Diner	professional
James	30 May 12	60: 15	Konditori, 7th Ave	professional
Jenny	04 Jun 12	52: 22	Noella Brew Bar	professional
Milla	12 Jun 12	53: 18	Noella Brew Bar	professional
Rachel	05 Jun 12	60: 19	Noella Brew Bar	professional
Bernard	06 Jun 12	71: 29	Venticinque	professional
Jackie	08 Jun 12	63: 52	Starbucks, 7th Ave	professional
Sandra	08 Jun 12	74: 04	The Tea Lounge	myself
Stella	11 Jun 12	62: 24	Noella Brew Bar	myself
Karine	12 Jun 12	67: 02	Starbucks Bay Ridge	professional
Kate	13 Jun 12	57: 58	Noella Brew Bar	professional
Barry	15 Jun 12	73: 06	Noella Brew Bar	myself
Graham	15 Jun 12	62: 20	Sycamore	myself
Zoe	21 Jun 12	51: 52	Konditori, 7th Ave	myself
Sean	22 Jun 12	60: 42	Blueprint	myself
Carl	26 Jun 12	61: 07	Noella Brew Bar	myself
Ava	29 Jun 12	51: 15	Noella Brew Bar	myself
Bella	01 Jul 12	58: 41	Gorilla Coffee	professional
Jess	18 Jul 12	68: 42	The Tea Lounge	myself
Kenneth	19 Jul 12	53: 14	Kenneth's home	myself
Sid	14 Aug 12	75: 19	Café Martin, 5th Ave	professional
Ed	17 Sep 12	84: 53	Blueprint	professional

11.5 Semi Structured Interviews

11.5.1 The Initial Interview Schedule from November 2011

1. How would you describe the Coop and what it is like to work there?
2. What funny stories or incidents help describe what it is like to work at the Coop?

Structure and Agency

3. How does humour and laughter provide meaning to our working life?
4. Humour has been described as an "internal redefining of reality". What do you think this involves?
5. Does humour and laughter affect your understanding of what it is to be an organizational member?
6. Is the humour here any different to other places you have worked?
7. Have you ever laughed because someone said something out of place?
8. How would you describe the physical working environment? Does that have an effect on people's humour and laughter?
9. Is some of the humour here a reaction to organizational values?
10. Do people tend to laugh even when the humour pokes fun at established organizational traits?

Identity

11. Does humour have an affect on employee attitudes to their work and the environment?
12. How do you use humour to demonstrate your own way of thinking?
13. How do people demonstrate their attitudes and beliefs when they joke and laugh at work?
14. Do working relationships that feature significant joking and laughing affect how you think about things?
15. Do you believe that laughing can cause an emotional bond between people? Does this feeling help clarify attitudes?
16. Does some of the humour reveal wider attitudes that run contrary to this organizations way of thinking?
17. Do you sometimes find yourself laughing because someone said something that matched feelings you have kept to yourself?

Relations of Power

18. Are there certain situations where joking or laughing would be frowned upon?
19. How are jokes and humour moderated by who is present?
20. Is humour and laughter sometimes seen as a problem by others at work?

Discipline

21. Knowing when and what to laugh at is part of learning social practices. Do you agree?
22. Does the humour and laughter here sometimes point to which attitudes fit in?
23. Can you think of any examples where humour has been used in order to make a point?

Resistance & Alternative Discourses

24. Rather than challenge authority, do people sometimes poke fun at the way things are done?
25. Are jokes and humour an acceptable way to voice distinctive views and opinions?
26. Do you think that the jokes we tell are sometimes more legitimate than the things we poke fun at?
27. Have you ever seen or heard something working here that reminded you of a funny scene from a comedy show on television?
28. Do you or others sometimes joke about procedures and directives?
29. I often use poetic license when retelling a story for comic effect. Have you ever reframed an incident that happened while working in order to make others laugh?

Is there anything else about humour and laughter that you would like to discuss? Maybe something I have missed?

11.5.2 Interview Schedule from April 2012

Opening Statements

My research examines Humour and laughter, recognizing that they are not simply social, they are sociological

We are creating a narrative and so it is important that you try to talk at length. The purpose of the interview is to create dialogue, where you use my points to form your own arguments and interpretations. The questions and topics are fluid and will depend on the flow of the conversation

Please do not wait for a question; feel free to speak whenever an idea or perspective comes to mind. Please try not to become passive; you should feel comfortable taking charge of the conversation.

T1 All jokes require a butt
What do you find funny about the Coop?
What do we need to share in order to find humour in something?

T2 Funny stories are cultural artefacts
How do jokes and humour help exaggerate certain common perceptions?
How do jokes and humour help us to form impressions, even where we have no direct experience?
How do funny stories about the coop help you understand the social environment?

T3 When we listen to stories/jokes/anecdotes
Does it temporarily change how we think and feel?
In that moment, have we changed the reality of our present situation?
Are these flights of imagination a way to "step outside" of the Coop's boundaries?
Have you ever read a funny book and found yourself starting to think about things in a different way?

T4 Our sense of community is connected to humour and laughter bonding people

Do you gravitate to members who are not taking things too seriously?

How does humour provide opportunities to understand attitudes?

Is laughter an important way of communicating attitudes?

Do people who take things too seriously find it tougher to connect to others?

How is the humour at the Coop inclusive?

The traditions of the coop include honesty, openness and caring for others. How does humour and laughter fit into that?

How does the strong culture restrict humour and laughter?

T5 Ownership includes having fun and enjoying time at the Coop

Do people strengthen their sense of ownership through humour/ jokes and laughter?

How does laughing at people who apply the rules too rigidly, establishes that we are more normal?

T6 Social discourse: People should be reasonable, flexible and fit in with others, not cause complications by being so one dimensional, so rigid

Are people who are too rigid a target for humour?

Is being “flexible” a core value here at the Coop?

Is there an idea that taking things too seriously, is “un-cooperative” in some way?

Does discourse that favours flexibility, allow for rules and procedures to be bent?

How does humour and laughter help you identify with others?

T7 Jokes and laughter are often centred on the rules

Do you think that this brings structures into perspective, making them feel more relevant?

T8 Many jokes rely on a sense of irony

How does a sense of irony allow us to distance ourselves from others?

How do “regular jokes” allow us to laugh about aspects of the Coop indirectly?

How does understanding humour require a slightly higher degree of interpretation?

How does “making eyes” allow people to reveal attitudes freely?

T9 Equality is an important aspect of the culture

How does humour empower people?

Can the power in humour and laughter undermine feelings of equality?

How does laughter allow us to distance ourselves from attitudes that we do not share?

T10 There is power "in" humour

By poking fun at something, are you less constrained by it?

How does humour provide power to what people say?

How does humour imply meaning?

How does humour tacitly allow people to enact power? There is power in humour and laughter – there is power in rules – there is power in authority

Is humour a type of "social engineering"?

Are some members more equal than others?

T11 Humour is used to examine all aspects of life

How does humour and laughter allow people to "bring in" other life experiences to work?

How does humour provide alternative outlooks and perspectives?

How does laughing change how we feel about something?

T12 A Sense of humour affects how we perceive ourselves, others and the organization

How does your sense of humour help define who you are?

How does your sense of humour effect how you think?

How is your sense of humour influenced by your community and culture?

How are a person's perceptions and humour linked?

Without a strong sense of humour, do people fall back on rules to provide some sense of control?

11.5.3 Interview Schedule from June 2012

1 What do we need to share in order to find humour in something?

2 How do jokes and humour help us to form impressions, even where we have no direct experience?

3 Have you ever read a funny book and found yourself starting to think about things in a different way?

4 How does humour provide opportunities to understand attitudes?

5 Do people who take things too seriously find it tougher to connect to others?

6 How does the strong culture restrict humour and laughter?

7 Do people strengthen their sense of ownership through humour/ jokes and laughter?

8 Is there an idea that taking things too seriously is "un-cooperative" in some way? (Social discourse: People should be reasonable, flexible and fit in with others)

9 How does humour and laughter help you identify with others?

10 Do you think jokes that are centred on the rules bring structures into perspective, making them feel more relevant?

11 How does a sense of irony allow us to distance ourselves from others?

12 How does understanding humour require a slightly higher degree of interpretation?

13 How does humour empower people?

14 Can the power in humour and laughter undermine feelings of equality?

15 By poking fun at something, are you less constrained by it?

16 How does humour provide power to what people say?

17 Is humour a type of "social engineering"?

18 Are some members more equal than others?

19 How does humour and laughter allow people to "bring in" other life experiences to work?

20 How does laughing change how we feel about something?

21 How does your sense of humour affect how you think?

22 How does humour provide a sense of control?